The Camp Fire Girls In After Years

Margaret Vandercook

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Merry Xmas to Rose.
From
Aunt Reid and John
XMas 1916

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN AFTER YEARS

BY

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ILLUSTRATED

PHILADELPHIA

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The Camp Fire Girls in After Years

CHAPTER I

The Inaugural Ball

FACING the hills, the great house had a wonderful view of the curving banks of a river.

Half an hour before sunset a number of workmen hurried away across the grounds, while a little later from behind the closed blinds glowed hundreds of softly shaded electric lights. The lawns were strung with rows and rows of small lamps suspended from one giant tree to the next, but waiting for actual darkness to descend before shedding forth their illumination.

Evidently preparations had been made on a splendid scale, both inside the house and out, for an entertainment of some

kind. Yet curiously there seemed to be a strange hush over everything, a sense of anxiety and suspense pervading the very atmosphere. Then, in odd contrast to the other lights, the room on the third floor to the left was in almost total darkness save for a single tiny flame no larger than a nurse's covered candle.

At about half-past six o'clock suddenly and with almost no noise the front door of the house opened. The next moment a slight form appeared upon the flight of broad steps and gazed down the avenue. From behind her came the mingled fragrance of roses and violets, while before her arose the even more delicious tang of earth and grass and softly drifting autumn leaves of the late October evening.

Nevertheless neither the beauty of the evening nor its perfumes attracted the girl's attention, for her expression remained grave and frightened, and without appearing aware of it she sighed several times.

Small and dark, with an extraordinary quantity of almost blue-black hair and a thin white face dominated by a pair of unhappy dark eyes, the girl's figure sug-

gested a child, although she was plainly older. In her hand she carried a cane upon which she leaned slightly.

"It does seem too hard for this trouble to have come at this particular time," she murmured in unconscious earnestness. "If only I could do something to help, yet there is absolutely nothing, of course, except to wait. Still, I wish Faith would come home."

Then, after peering for another moment down the avenue of old elms and maple trees, she turned and went back into the house, closing the door behind her and moving almost noiselessly.

For the present no one else was to be seen, at least in the front part of the big mansion, except the solitary figure of this young girl, who looked somewhat incongruous and out of place in her handsome surroundings. Notwithstanding, she seemed perfectly at home and was plainly neither awed by nor unfamiliar with them. The hall was decorated with palms and evergreens and festoons of vines, and adorning the high walls were portraits, most of them of men of stern countenance and of a past

generation, while here and there stood a marble bust. But without regarding any of these things with special attention the girl walked quickly past them and entered the drawing room on the right. Then at last her face brightened.

Surely the room was beautiful enough to have attracted any one's attention, although it was not exactly the kind of room one would see in a private house, for it happened to be in the Governor's mansion in the state of New Hampshire.

In preparation for the evening's entertainment the furniture had been moved away except for a number of chairs and divans. The two tall marble mantels were banked with roses and violets and baskets of roses swung from the two crystal chandeliers.

With a murmured exclamation the girl dropped down on a low stool in the corner where the evergreens almost entirely concealed her and where she appeared more like an elf creature that had come into the house with the green things surrounding her than an everyday girl. For a quarter of an hour she must have remained

there alone, when she was aroused from her reverie by some one's entrance. Then, although the girl did not move or speak, her whole face changed and the sullen, unhappy look disappeared, while oddly her eyes filled with tears.

There could have been nothing fairer in the room than the woman who had just come quietly into it. She must have been about twenty-eight years old; her hair was a beautiful auburn, like sunshine on certain brown and red leaves in the woods in late October; her eyes were gray, and she was of little more than medium height, with slender hips, but a full throat and chest. At the present moment she was wearing a house gown of light blue cashmere, and although she looked as if life might always before have been kind to her, at present her face was pale and there were marks of sleeplessness about her eyes and mouth.

Apparently trying to summon an interest in her surroundings which she scarcely felt, she glanced about the room until her eyes rested on the silent girl.

"Why, Angel, what are you doing in

here alone, child? How lovely everything looks, and yet I am afraid I cannot come down to receive people tonight. All afternoon I have been trying to make up my mind to attempt it and each moment it seems more impossible."

Then with a gesture indicating both fatigue and discouragement the woman sat down, folding her hands in her lap.

"But the baby isn't any worse, I heard only half an hour ago," the younger girl interrupted quickly, and in answer to a shake of the head from her companion went on: "You simply must be present tonight, Princess. This is the greatest night in your husband's career and you know the Inaugural Ball would be an entire failure without you! Staying up-stairs won't do little Tony any good. And think what it would mean to the Governor to have to manage all alone! You know you promised Anthony before his election that you would attend to the social side of his office for him, as he declared he didn't know enough to undertake it. So you can't desert him at the very beginning."

Swiftly Angelique Martins crossed the room and seated herself on the arm of her friend's chair. "I promise you on my honor that I shall sit just outside little Tony's bedroom the entire evening and if he is even the tiniest bit worse I shall come down and tell you on the instant."

There was a moment of silence and then the newly elected Governor's wife replied: "I suppose you are right, Angel, and I must try to do what you say, for nothing else is fair to Anthony. Yet I never dreamed of ever having to choose between my love and duty to my baby and my husband! But dear me, I am sure I have not the faintest idea how the Governor's Lady should behave at her first reception, even if I have to make my début in the character in the next few hours."

Then, in a lighter tone than she had yet used in their conversation, Betty Ashton, who was now Mrs. Governor Graham, smiled, placing her hand for a moment on that of her companion.

For the friendship between Betty Ashton and the little French girl whom she had discovered at the hospital in Boston

had never wavered even after the Betty of the Camp Fire days had become Mrs. Anthony Graham, wife of the youngest governor ever elected to the highest office in his state. Moreover, Betty and Anthony now had two children of their own, the little Tony, a baby of about two years old, who was now dangerously ill on the top floor of the Governor's mansion, and Bettina, who was six.

Angelique Martins was almost like an adoring younger sister. She was approaching twenty; yet on account of her lameness and shyness she appeared much younger. But she was one of the odd girls who in some ways are like children and yet in others are older than people ever dream. After her mother's death, several years before, she had come to live with Betty and Anthony and held a position as an assistant stenographer in the Governor's office. Ordinarily she was strangely silent and reserved, so that no one, not even her best friend, entirely understood her.

"But you must not miss the ball tonight, Angel," Betty now continued more cheer-

fully. "You and Faith have been talking of it for weeks, and so I can't have you sacrifice yourself for me. Besides, one of the nurses can do what you offered and send me a message if I am needed. Don't you remember that your dress is even prettier than Faith's? I was perfectly determined it should be." And Betty smiled, amused at herself. She was always a little jealous for her protégé of Faith Barton. It was true that since their first meeting at Sunrise Cabin the two girls had become close friends. But then Betty could seldom fail to see, just as she had in the beginning, the painful contrast between them. Faith had grown into a beautiful girl and Dr. Barton and Rose were entirely devoted to her; and she had also both charm and talent, although still given to impossible dreams about people and things.

Angel now shook her head. "You know you would feel safer with me to stand guard over Tony than if you had only one of the servants," she argued a little resentfully. Then with her cheeks crimsoning: "Besides, Princess, you know that

I perfectly loathe having to meet strangers. No one in the world except you could ever have induced me even to think of it. I am ever so much happier alone with you and the children or pegging away at my typewriter at the office. I believe people ought to remain where they belong in this world, and you can't possibly make me look like Faith by dressing me up in pretty clothes. I should never conceive of being her rival in anything."

There was a curious note in the lame girl's voice that passed unnoticed, for her companion suddenly inquired: "By the way, dear, do you know what has become of Faith? I passed her room and she was not there. I hope she is not out alone. I know she has a fashion of loving to go about in the twilight, dreaming her dreams and composing verse. Still, when she is here visiting me I would much rather she did not."

"But Faith isn't alone. She is with the Governor's secretary, Kenneth Helm," Angel answered. "Mr. Helm came to the house with a message and Faith asked him to go out with her."

Betty smiled. Faith Barton scorned conventionalities and felt sure that she was above certain of them. "Oh, I did not know Kenneth and Faith had learned to know each other so well in two weeks' time," she replied carelessly, her attention wandering to the little Tony up-stairs. "However, Faith is all right if she is with Kenneth. I know Anthony has the greatest possible trust in him or he would never have selected him for his secretary in such troublesome political times as these. I don't believe you seem to like Kenneth as much as you once did. But you must not be prejudiced against so many people. He used to be very kind to you."

Without waiting for Angel's reply Betty walked away. If she could have seen her expression she might have been surprised or annoyed.

For sometimes Angel had wondered if it would be wise for her to take her friend into her confidence. Surely she had reasons for not being so sure of the Governor's confidence in his secretary. But then what proof had she to offer against him?

Besides, people often considered her suspicious and unfriendly. Moreover, in this case the French girl did not altogether trust herself. Was there not some personal reason in her dislike? It was entirely true that she had not felt like this in the beginning of their acquaintance.

With a feeling of irritation against herself, Angel started to leave the drawing room. This was plainly no time for worrying over the future; she must go and have something to eat at once so as to be able to help watch the baby. There was only one regret the girl felt at her own decision. She was sorry not to see Betty receiving her guests at the Inaugural Ball tonight. For her friend remained her ideal of what a great lady should be in the best sense. Moreover, there would be other old friends whom she had once known at Sunrise Cabin. However, some of them were guests at the mansion, so she could meet them later.

Out in the hall the little French girl now discovered Faith and Kenneth Helm returning from their walk. The Governor's private secretary must have been about

twenty-four or five years old. He was a Yale graduate and had light-brown hair and eyes of almost the same color. He had the shoulders of an athlete, a clear, bright complexion, and as Angel watched them she could not deny that he had a particularly charming smile. However, he was assuredly not looking at her. It was absurd to care, of course, yet nevertheless even the humblest person scarcely likes being wilfully ignored. And Angel was sure that the young man had seen her, even though he gave no appearance of having done so.

The next moment, after her companion's departure, Faith Barton turned to her friend. Faith's cheeks were delicately flushed from her walk in the autumn air and her pale gold hair was blowing about her face. Her blue eyes were wide open and clear and she looked curiously innocent of any wrong or misfortune in the world. Surely there were seldom two girls offering a more complete contrast than the two who now tiptoed softly down the long hall together.

"I am going to rest a little while," Faith

said at parting. "But do let us try to have a long, quiet talk tomorrow. I want to tell you a secret that no one else in the world must know for the present."

CHAPTER II

New Names for Old Acquaintances

THERE was a shimmer of silver and blue on the stairs and then the man with his eyes upturned saw his wife moving toward him in a kind of cloud.

The next moment with a laugh of mingled embarrassment and pleasure Betty Graham put up her hand, covering her husband's eyes.

"You must not look at me like that, Anthony, or you will make me abominably vain," she whispered. "Wait until the girls and the receiving party appear and then you will see what an ordinary person the new 'Governor's Lady' is and repent having raised humble Betty Ashton to such an exalted position."

Arm in arm the husband and wife now moved toward the drawing room.

"How little we ever dreamed of this grandeur, dear, in the days when I had

to work so hard to persuade you to marry me."

"Perhaps if I had known I never should have dared," Betty went on, still half in earnest. "But I mean to do the best I can to help in our new position, although I must confess I am dreadfully frightened at having to receive so many distinguished people tonight. However, nurse says Tony is really better. And I shall have you to tell me what I ought to say and do."

Now under the tall crystal chandelier the young Governor lifted his wife's hand to his lips with a smile at her absurdity. In spite of his ordinary origin Anthony Graham had a curious courtliness of manner. It was amusing to hear Betty talking of being afraid of people. All her life she had had unusual social charm, winning friends and admiration in every circle of society almost from her babyhood. Naturally in the years since her marriage, during her husband's struggle from the position of a successful young lawyer in a small town to the highest office in the state, both her charm and self-possession had increased. Indeed, it was well known

that she had been her husband's chief inspiration and aid, and there were many persons who declared that it had been the wife's beauty and money that were responsible for the husband's success. However, this remark was made by the Governor's political enemies and not his friends and was of course untrue.

Nevertheless Anthony did look somewhat boyish and insignificant tonight for his distinguished position. He was of only medium height, and although his shoulders were broad, he had never lost the thinness of his boyhood due to hardships and too severe study. Yet there was nothing weak or immature about his face with its deep-set hazel eyes, the high, grave forehead with the dark hair pushed carelessly back, and the firm, almost obstinate, set of his lips.

Indeed, the young Governor already had gained a reputation for obstinacy, and once persuaded to a policy or an idea, was difficult to change. This trait of character had been partly responsible for his election to office. For there had been serious graft and dishonesty in the politics of New

Hampshire, and led by Anthony Graham the younger men in the state had been able to defeat the old-time political ring. Whether or not the good government party would be allowed to remain in power depended largely on the new Governor. He had promised to stop the graft and crime in the state and to give positions to no persons who were not fitted for them. Of course this meant that he must have many enemies who would do their best to destroy his reputation. Already they were aware that the young Governor's one weakness was his devotion to his beautiful wife.

But Betty used often to be amused at the outside world's opinion of her husband's character. For never once in their married life so far had he ever refused any request of hers. Therefore the real test was yet to come.

Five minutes later and there was once more the sound of movement and laughter on the stairway when the re-opening of the drawing room door admitted six persons, who were to form the first members of the receiving line.

First came Doctor and Mrs. Richard Ashton. Already Dick had made a reputation for himself as a surgeon in Boston, while Esther was one of the plain girls who so frequently grow handsomer as they grow older. Her tallness and pallor with her abundant red hair and sweet yet reserved manner formed tonight as striking a contrast to her sister's grace and animation as it had in the days when they first learned to know of the closeness of the tie between them.

Mr. and Mrs. William Webster had come all the way from Woodford to Concord, leaving three babies at home, to assist their old friends at the Inaugural Ball. You must have guessed that Mollie O'Neill, as Mrs. William Webster, would have grown plumper and prettier during the busy, happy years of married life with her husband and children on their large farm. For Mollie now had a small daughter "Polly," named for her beloved twin sister, and a pair of twin sons, Dan and Billy. She was more than ever in love with her husband and, many people believed, entirely under his thumb. Yet there were times

when Mollie could and would assert herself in a surprising fashion just as she had in former days with her girl friends.

Tonight she was wearing a white silk which looked just the least bit countrified and yet was singularly becoming to Mollie's milk-white skin, pink cheeks and shining black hair. Yet in spite of never having changed his occupation of farmer, there was little to suggest the countryside in Billy Webster's appearance, except in his unusual strength and size. For he had fulfilled the prediction made to Polly O'Neill over a Camp Fire luncheon many years before. He had remained a farmer and a highly successful one and yet had seen a good deal of the world and understood many things besides farming.

Of the three Sunrise Hill Camp Fire girls who had within the last few moments joined Betty and her husband, the third was the most changed. For is it not difficult to imagine Meg Everett transformed into a fashionable society woman, Meg, whose hair never would stay neatly braided, whose waist and skirt so frequently failed to connect?

However, after a number of love affairs, to her friends' surprise Meg had married a man as unlike her in taste and disposition as one could well imagine. He was a worldly, fashionable man, supposed to be wealthy. Anyhow, he and Meg lived in a handsome house, owned a motor car and entertained a great deal. They had no children, and perhaps this was the reason why Meg did not look altogether happy. Sometimes her old friends had wondered if there could be other reasons, for Meg had always been a warm-hearted, impetuous girl, careless of fashions and indifferent to conventions, and now she was always dressed in clothes of the latest design and at least appeared like a fashionable woman.

Nevertheless Meg had always been more easily influenced than any other of the Camp Fire girls, hating to oppose the wishes of any one near to her heart. Her husband, Jack Emmet, was an intimate friend of her adored brother John. He and Meg made an attractive couple, for although Mr. Emmet was not handsome, he was tall and had a slender, correct figure

and sharply cut features with light blue eyes and brown hair. Meg's costume was quite as beautiful as Betty's, a soft rose silk and chiffon, and her golden hair was fastened with a small rope of pearls.

"You are as lovely tonight as ever, Betty, and I know Anthony is proud of you," Meg whispered, holding her friend's hand for an instant. "Remember when you once believed that Anthony was falling in love with me? Silly child, he never thought of any one except you! But then he and I have always been special friends since he believed I helped him win you. I want to tell him how proud I feel of you both tonight."

As Meg moved away, Mollie's plump arm, which was only partly concealed by her glove, slipped inside her hostess's.

"It is nice we can have a few moments to ourselves before the ball begins," she remarked shyly, glancing toward her husband, who was for the moment talking with Jack Emmet. The two men did not like each other, but had been forced into conversation by Meg's moving off with Anthony.

Betty kissed her friend, quite forgetting the dignity of her position on the present occasion.

"Dear old Mollie, it is good of you to have come to help me tonight! I know you don't like this society business. How I wish we had Polly here with us! She promised to come if possible, but I had a telegram from her only this afternoon saying that she is almost on the other side of the continent. It was dated Denver, I believe."

The same look of affectionate incomprehension which she had often directed toward Polly, again crossed Mollie Webster's pretty face.

"It is just as impossible as ever to keep up with Polly," she explained half complainingly. "She has been acting through the West all summer, but promised to come home for a visit this autumn. Now she writes she won't be here for some time. Dear me, I do wish that Polly would marry and settle down. Of course I know it is wonderful for her to have become such a distinguished actress, but I never think she is very happy and I am always worrying over her."

Betty laughed and then looked serious. "Polly never will settle down, as you mean it, Mollie dear, even if she should marry," she argued, forgetting for the moment the other friends close about her and the evening's ordeal. For her thoughts had traveled away to Polly O'Neill, who was to her surprise still Polly O'Neill. For at one time she had certainly believed that Polly had intended marrying Richard Hunt, the actor, and just why their engagement had been broken no one had ever been told. Possibly it was because Polly had wished to devote herself entirely to her work. She had always said as a girl that marriage should never be allowed to interfere with her career, and certainly it had not. For the Polly who had made her first success some ten years before in the little Irish play was now one of the best known actresses in the United States. Indeed, she had succeeded to the position once held by Margaret Adams, since Margaret Adams had married and retired.

However, for the present there was no further opportunity for mutual confidences, since in the interval Faith Barton had

appeared and with her the Governor's new secretary, besides a dozen other persons, most of them political friends, who were to assist in opening the Inaugural Ball.

As Anthony joined her, Betty felt her cheeks flush and her knees tremble for an instant. Moving toward them, accompanied by his wife, was the man whom Anthony had defeated in the election for Governor. To save her life Betty could not help recalling at this instant all the hateful things this man had previously said against her husband. Yet she must not be childish, nor show ill feeling. Ex-Governor Peyton and his wife were much older than she and Anthony, and besides they were their guests.

Betty's manner was perfectly gracious and collected by the time the visitors reached them.

CHAPTER III

Idle Suspicion

SHE had sat huddled up in a chair outside the baby's room for several hours. Her self-sacrifice had been entirely unnecessary, as half a dozen persons had assured her, but Angel was by no means certain that she was not happier in her present position than if she had been down-stairs in the crowded ball-room unnoticed and perhaps in the way of the few people who would try to be kind to her.

Two or three times she had stolen in to look at Tony. He was sleeping quietly and peacefully, a big beautiful baby with Betty's soft auburn hair and Anthony's hazel eyes. But now a clock somewhere was striking twelve and Angel decided that she must have a look at the guests before they went away. She had put on the white frock of soft chiffon and lace that Betty had given her, but somehow

it only made her look more childish and insignificant. Her face was pale now with weariness and her hair and eyes seemed so dark in comparison as to give her a kind of uncanny appearance. Perhaps waiting to gain more courage and perhaps for other reasons, immediately after leaving the nursery Angel, before starting down-stairs, went into another big room at the end of the hall.

As the girl leaned over to gaze at a little sleeper a small hand reached up and touched her face. It was that of Bettina, the "little Princess" as everybody called her. Nevertheless Bettina was not in the least like her mother. She had long hair that was gold in some lights and in others a pale brown, and her eyes were bluer than gray. Indeed, Polly had once said of her two or three years before, that Tina's eyes had no color like other people's, for they merely reflected the lights above them like a clear pool. The little girl was slender and quiet and many persons believed her shy, which was not altogether true. Possibly the oddest of her characteristics was her ability to understand what other people

were thinking and feeling without being told.

Now she whispered: "Why don't you just find a place where you can see, Angel, without any one's seeing you? I shall want you to tell me everything tomorrow. Mother won't understand in the way I mean."

Of course that was just what she should have been doing for these past two hours, Angelique thought to herself as soon after she slipped away. But it was like Bettina to have suggested it. Already she knew the exact place where she might have been in hiding all this time.

On the second floor toward the rear of the house there was a kind of square landing which faced a small room that was oddly separated from the other apartments. For this reason the Governor had chosen it for his private study. Only one servant was allowed to enter this room and very rarely any member of the family. For in it were kept a number of important letters and papers.

But concealing the entrance tonight were a number of palms and other tall plants,

and by placing a small camp chair behind them one could see through the railing of the balustrade down into the big hall. The music was there and many beautifully dressed people were walking up and down.

The little French girl stared for ten minutes without moving. She had a curious, almost passionate love of beautiful people and things, inherited from some far-off French ancestor, who may have been a great artist or perchance only carried a great artist's longings in his soul. Indeed, Angel had real talent of her own and whatever her hands touched she could make lovely, whether it was designing a dress, decorating a room or even making a sketch of a scene or a flower, anything that had appealed to her imagination. Through her Camp Fire training she had learned to make remarkable use of her hands, especially in the days before she was able to leave her wheeled chair. Indeed, Betty and all of her friends had been disappointed when she had failed to follow some artistic profession. Betty had urged and pleaded with her to become

an artist or designer and had offered to pay her expenses, yet as soon as she was well enough Angel had insisted upon studying something through which she could at once make her living. By this time the little French girl had been brought too close to life's realities not to understand its difficulties. To make her living as an artist or a designer would take years and years of study and work before she could hope to succeed. Besides, Betty, in spite of Judge Maynard's legacy, was not so rich as she was generous and there were always other people to be thought of. For the Princess had never ceased her generosities, and even if her husband had become a distinguished man it would be difficult for him ever to be a rich one unless something unforeseen happened. Therefore Angel had been happy enough with her stenography and typewriting and with her new position in the Governor's office. For in her heart of hearts it was her philosophy that duty could be done every day and beauty kept for certain exquisite moments.

Now, however, she felt that one of

these perfect moments had come. Only she wished that Betty or some one whom she knew might appear within her range of vision. It was entertaining, of course, to watch the strangers and to decide whose clothes were prettiest and guess their names.

Angel drew her chair farther away from the landing so she could peep squarely through the banisters and was now some distance from the study door. Moreover, the following moment she had caught a glimpse of a friend whom she had wished to see almost as much as Betty. There stood a tall girl with pale gold hair, wearing a frock of white and blue, and talking to a young man in as absorbed a fashion as if they had been entirely alone. It was difficult to see her companion and yet the French girl felt that she might have guessed before she finally discovered him. For Faith's face wore the same rapt, excited expression it had worn that afternoon on returning from her walk. What could it mean? Angel pondered. Surely Faith and Kenneth Helm did not yet know each other well enough for Faith's secret

to have anything to do with him. Their acquaintance had started only about ten days before.

Surely in her absorbed interest Angelique had no thought of spying on her friend, for two people could not be seriously confidential when hundreds of others were close about them. Nevertheless the watcher felt her own cheeks flush guiltily as she saw the young man below her whispering something in his companion's ear. The next instant, however, Faith had left the hall with some one else. Then to her intense consternation Angel observed Kenneth Helm coming alone straight up the broad stairs. Could it be possible that either one of them had seen her and that Faith was sending Kenneth to bring her down to the ballroom? With all her heart Angel hoped not. She would like to have gotten up and run away to shelter, yet knew it was impossible for her to move without making a noise. By remaining silent there was just a chance that Kenneth Helm was on his way to the men's dressing room and would not notice her. Moreover, if Faith had not

He Glanced Quickly About Him and Then Disappeared

sent him to find her probably he would not even speak to her.

It was quite true that the girl in hiding need have felt no concern. The young man certainly did not see her, nor did he pass her by. For some odd reason he stopped for a moment at the top of the landing, glanced quickly about him and then disappeared inside the Governor's private study, opening the door with a key which must have been given him for the especial purpose.

"What could Kenneth wish in there tonight?" Angelique wondered idly, somewhat relieved because his errand plainly had nothing to do with her. Moreover, there was too much that was absorbing below stairs to give a great deal of thought to anything else just at present.

The next instant Angel started, uttering a little gasp of anger and dismay, as a hand was laid rudely upon her shoulder.

"Whom are you spying upon now, 'Angel in the House?' " the young man's voice asked mockingly. "Don't you think that perhaps you are rather an uncanny person anyhow?"

The girl flushed and found it impossible to keep her lips from trembling. When she had first gone to work in Anthony Graham's office, Kenneth Helm had also been employed there and had been unusually kind to her. Recently, however, he seemed to have avoided and almost to have disliked her. This she knew had caused a change in her own attitude, so perhaps her prejudice against the young man's position as the Governor's private secretary was largely due to this. Nevertheless she had done nothing to deserve the change in his treatment of her, and if a human being is disloyal to one friendship, why not to another?

However, at the present moment the girl only wished to be left alone, so she merely shook her head, explaining: "I didn't mean to be spying upon any one, and I am sorry if you think I am uncanny." Then she glanced pathetically down toward the cane at her side, and this time her companion blushed.

"Oh, I did not mean that, Miss Martins. That is not fair of you," he remonstrated. "But please don't mention to the Governor

or any one that you saw me go into his private study tonight, will you? You see, I had forgotten something that I ought to have attended to at the office. My memory is not so good as yours. Won't you let me take you down-stairs?"

The lame girl rose slowly, not knowing exactly how to refuse the young man's offer. Besides, she remembered what Betty had said to her. She must not be so suspicious and prejudiced against people."

"Certainly I won't speak to Mr. Graham of your having gone into his office. Why should I?" she conceded, laying her hand lightly on her companion's arm. "Besides, do you think I talk to the Governor about his affairs just because I live in his house? He is so quiet and stern I am dreadfully afraid of him. It is Betty, Mrs. Graham, who is my friend. If it is not too much trouble to you and she is not too busy I would like to have you take me to her now for a little while. Never in my life have I seen anything so splendid as this reception tonight!"

When the little French girl talked she was not half so homely and unattractive,

Kenneth Helm decided as he made his way with her through the crowd. Moreover, he must not turn her into an enemy, for assuredly Mrs. Graham was her devoted friend and what his wife desired was law with the Governor.

Kenneth Helm intended to succeed in life. This was the keynote of his character. He wanted money and power and meant to do anything necessary to attain them.

CHAPTER IV

Ties from Other Days

ONE morning, a few days later, Mrs. Jack Emmet was ushered into Betty's personal sitting room. Betty was writing notes and Bettina was curled up in a big chair near the window with a book of fairy tales in her lap.

Both of them rose at once, Betty kissing her friend affectionately. But her little girl, who showed her affection differently from other children, sitting down by Meg's side, slipped her small hand inside hers.

Meg was beautifully dressed in a dark blue broadcloth and black fox furs with a velvet hat and small black feather curled close against her light hair. Yet the hat was the least bit awry, one lock of hair had come uncurled and been blown about by the wind, and a single blue button hung loose on the stylish coat. Noticing these absurd details for some reason or other,

Betty felt oddly pleased. For they brought back the Meg of old days, whom not all the strenuous years of Camp Fire training had been able to make as neat as she should have been, although since her marriage she seemed to have greatly changed.

Therefore, in observing these unimportant facts of her friend's costume Betty failed to catch the difference in her expression. They began their conversation idly enough in discussing the ball of a few nights before, the Governor's health and just how busy he was and what people were saying of him in Concord. For, although Mr. and Mrs. Graham had only been installed in the Governor's mansion a few weeks, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Emmet had been living in Concord ever since their marriage about five years before.

Nevertheless, if Betty had not observed the change in her friend, in some unaccountable fashion Bettina had. Not that the little girl realized that Mrs. Emmet had dark circles under her eyes and that instead of gazing directly at her mother as she talked, her glance traveled restlessly about

the pretty room. Nor did Bettina know that Meg's cheeks were not a natural pink, but flushed to uncomfortable redness; no, she only appreciated that "Aunt Meg," for whom she cared a great deal, was uneasy and unhappy and would perhaps enjoy having her keep close beside her.

"You will stay and take lunch with us, won't you, dear?" Betty urged, moving forward to assist her visitor in removing her wraps. "You see, we shall probably be all by ourselves. Anthony is too busy to come home, Angel is at the office and Faith asked to be left alone for the day. The child is probably scribbling away on some story she desires to write. Then after lunch we can see little Tony. The baby is well again, only the nurse wants him kept quiet."

Affectionately Betty placed her hands on Meg's shoulders and standing directly beside her now for the first time looked closely into her face. To her shocked surprise she discovered that unexpected tears had started to Meg's eyes.

At once Betty Graham's happy expression clouded. For she was no less ready

with her sympathy than in former days, and the Camp Fire girls of the old Sunrise Club seemed almost like real sisters.

"You came to tell me of something that is troubling you and I didn't dream of it till this minute!" Betty exclaimed, slipping off Meg's coat and unpinning her hat without waiting for permission. Then, pushing her friend down into a big, soft armchair, she took a lower one opposite.

"Isn't it good fortune that we are living in the same place just as we used to long ago?" She continued talking, of course, to allow her companion to gain her self-control. Then she glanced toward Bettina, but Meg only drew the little girl closer, hiding her face for an instant in her soft hair.

"I'm absurd to be so nervous, Betty," Meg whispered apologetically. "Please don't think there is anything serious the matter. Only—only I have come to ask you a favor and I don't know exactly how to begin. Of course, we used to be very intimate friends and all that, but now you are the Governor's wife, and—and——"

Before she could finish a somewhat hurt

voice interposed. "And—and—I am Betty Ashton Graham still, very much at your service, Sweet Marjoram, as Polly once named you. Dear me, Meg, don't be absurd. I can't say I feel particularly exalted by my position as wife of the new Governor, though of course I am frightfully vain of Anthony. Besides you know if there is anything I can do that you would like, I shall be happier than I can say." With a laugh that still had something serious in it, Betty put her hand over her friend's. "I still insist that I owe Anthony partly to you," she ended.

But this time Meg did not trouble to argue the absurd statement.

She began talking at once as rapidly as possible, as if glad to get the subject off her mind.

"It's about John, I came to talk to you, my brother, John Everett, Betty," Meg explained. "I don't know whether you have seen much of him lately, but you were devoted friends once and I thought perhaps for the sake of the past you might be interested."

"John Everett? For the sake of the

past I might be interested! Whatever are you talking about?" Betty was now frowning in her effort to understand and looked absurdly like a girl, with her level brows drawn near together and her lips pouting slightly. "Why, of course I am interested. I used to like John better than any of the other beaus we had, when we were girls, except Anthony. Tell me, is John going to be married at last? I have wondered why he has waited such a long time. But I suppose he wanted to be rich first. It has been about two years since we met by accident in a theater in New York, but I thought he had grown handsomer than ever." This time Betty's laugh was more teasing than sympathetic. "I wonder why sisters are so jealous of their big brothers marrying, Mrs. Jack Emmet? You are married yourself—why begrudge John the good fortune? I don't believe Nan has ever entirely forgiven me for capturing Anthony. I am convinced she would have preferred any other of the Camp Fire girls. There is only one of us, however, whom she would have really liked, and that is Sylvia. Yet who would ever think of Doctor Sylvia Wharton's marrying?"

This time Meg's voice was firmer. "But John isn't going to be married, Betty. It is quite a different thing I wish to talk to you about. Instead of John's getting rich on Wall Street, as you think, he has gotten dreadfully poor. And I am afraid it is not just his own money he has lost, but father's savings. Now Horace will have to give up his college and I really don't know what will become of father. He is too old to begin teaching again since his resignation several years ago."

Her voice broke, but then her friend's face was so bewildered and so full of a sudden, ardent sympathy, that it was difficult for Meg to keep her self-control. However, she said nothing more for a minute, but sat biting her lips and wondering how to go on to the next thing.

Fortunately Betty helped her. "I expect John will have to come back home and take care of your father. Horace is too young and it is more John's place than your husband's. I am sorry, for I'm afraid things will seem pretty dull for him here after his gay life in New York."

All at once Betty's face cleared a little

and she leaned back in her chair. "But you remember, Meg, that when you first spoke you said you wished me to do you a favor. Is there anything in the world I can do? I am sure I can scarcely imagine what it is, yet if I can in any way help you out of this trouble——"

"You can," Meg whispered shyly; "that is, perhaps not you, but Anthony, and you are almost the same person."

In answer to this rather surprising statement Betty Graham merely shook her head quietly. However, this was scarcely the time to argue whether or not marriage merged two persons into one or simply made each one bigger and more individual from association with the other. She wanted to do whatever was possible to assist Meg and John Everett too in this trying time in their affairs. Besides, as a little girl she had always been fond of old Professor Everett, whose life had been given to the wisdom of books rather than to the living world. But most of all, being a very natural woman, Betty was now keenly curious to know how she could possibly be expected to be involved in the

present situation and what she could do to help out.

"You are right. John does mean to come home, or at least he wishes to return. He says he is tired of New York and all the fret and hurry and struggle of life there. But you see, Betty dear," and Meg spoke quickly now that she had finally come to the point of her story, "there is no use John's returning unless he has something to do. There is where you and Anthony can help. I didn't think of this myself, but when my husband and I were talking things over he said that Anthony and you and I were such old friends and that the new Governor had so many appointments he could make to all sorts of good positions. So we thought perhaps you would ask Anthony to help John. I know Anthony does anything you wish."

"Oh!" Betty replied somewhat blankly. For never had she been more surprised than by Meg's request. Of course she knew that Anthony was making a number of changes in positions held by people whom he thought unworthy of trust throughout the state. Often he talked

about what he felt he should do, but really it had never dawned upon Betty until this minute that she or her friends could be in any way concerned. Still, why not? John was a good business man, Betty thought; he was not dishonest or dishonorable and the Everetts were her old friends. If Anthony could help them in their present trouble, surely he would be as glad as she was to have the opportunity.

Yet Betty hesitated before answering. However, as she did not wish to make Meg uncomfortable she slipped from her own chair and put her arm sympathetically about her friend's shoulders, while she endeavored to think things quietly over. Finally Betty returned:

"I can't *exactly* promise what you first asked, Meg dear. You see, I have always intended not to interfere in the things that did not seem altogether my affair. But somehow, since you have asked me and for John's and your father's sakes, who are such old friends, why I don't feel as I did before. I tell you, I *will* ask Anthony this very night, so let's don't worry any more. Tina darling, run and tell the maids we

would like our luncheon up here. Our dining room is so absurdly big."

As she talked, as if by magic Betty's expression had changed and again she was her usual gay, light-hearted self. Of course she and Anthony together would be able to clear away Meg's troubles. Never before had she entirely realized how fine it was to have power and influence.

Moreover, Betty's confidence also inspired Meg, and for the first time in weeks Mrs. Jack Emmet felt like the Meg Everett of the old days in Woodford, who used to keep house for her father, kiss her small brother Horace's (surnamed Bump's) wounds and help and encourage her big brother John in all his ambitions and desires.

Just as Meg went away, however, she insisted quite seriously:

"Betty, I often think that even if our old Camp Fire Club did nothing more for us than to bind our friendships together in the way it has, it would be dreadful for all girls not to have the same opportunities in their lives. Talk of college friendships, surely they are not to be compared with those of Camp Fire clubs!"

CHAPTER V

Something Unexpected

DINNER was tiresomely dull! Again Anthony did not return, but telephoned that he would be in as soon afterwards as possible. Several times during the meal Betty almost wished that she had accepted an invitation for the evening without him. For they had been invited to a dinner party and dance, but as Anthony had declared he would be too busy to attend, Betty had declined without any objection at the time. She had made up her mind never to go out into society unless accompanied by her husband.

Nevertheless, tonight the young wife of the new Governor felt somewhat differently. If Anthony was going everlastingly to be kept at his office must she always sit alone during the evenings? Always as Betty Ashton she had loved people and gayety and still loved it quite as much as Betty Graham. Moreover, her only two com-

panions at dinner, Angel and Faith, were both in extremely bad humor and unwilling to confess the cause, for Faith looked sulky and annoyed and Angel undeniably cross. Of course, the two girls must recently have had a quarrel. Their hostess wondered for a few moments what the trouble could have been. But then they were so utterly different in their dispositions and tastes, it was not surprising that they sometimes disagreed. Besides, she decided that they were both unlike the intimate friends of her youth and far harder to understand. In fact, though she was scarcely much more than a girl herself, Mrs. Graham concluded that "girls had changed since her day" and determined as soon as dinner was over to leave them to themselves. Naturally, if they had wished her society Betty would have been glad enough to have remained and received their confidences. However, neither Angel nor Faith showed the slightest sign of desiring her society.

In a pale blue silk dinner gown Betty wandered disconsolately about her big house waiting for her husband. He had promised to come home early and it seemed not

worth while to settle down to any task beforehand. The babies were asleep and she did not feel like writing letters either to Esther or her mother. Several times she thought of Polly. But Polly was so far away out West that she really did not know where to find her at the present time. Betty wondered if her best friend was happy with no home or husband or children, nothing intimate in her life but her career as an artist. She had always been puzzled to understand why Polly and Richard Hunt had never married after an engagement lasting over several years. But since neither of them had cared to explain their separation, it was, of course, useless to conjecture again after all this time.

The drawing room was too hopelessly big and formal! After Betty had walked around inside it for half an hour perhaps, sitting down in half a dozen chairs and then pacing up and down, she grew even more restless. Surely it was no longer early in the evening, and why did Anthony not keep his word and come home at the time he had promised? It would be ever so much more satisfactory to have her talk

with him in regard to giving John Everett a good position, with a comfortable salary, early in the evening, before they were both tired and wanting to sleep.

Suddenly, with an impatient stamp of her foot, Mrs. Graham fled from her state apartment. She was homesick tonight for her old home in Woodford, where she and Anthony had lived ever since their marriage until his election as Governor, and where her mother still lived.

Passing through the hall, more and more did Betty become convinced that Anthony was not keeping his word, for the tall clock registered quarter to ten. The upper part of the house looked dark and quiet as if the rest of the family had already gone to bed. Besides it was lonely enough on the first floor, for the servants had their sitting room and dining room in a big old-fashioned basement and were nowhere to be seen. Of course, one of them would come at once if she desired anything, but Betty could not think of anything she wished at present except society and amusement.

In the library back of the drawing room

a few moments later she decided that things were not so bad. There was a little wood fire in the grate, kept there for its cheerful influence and not because the steam-heated house required it; but Betty had not been a Camp Fire girl for half her lifetime without responding to the cheerful influence of even a grate fire.

Sinking down into a comfortable chair, she picked up a magazine and began reading. The clock in the hall ticked on and on and she was not conscious of the passing of time. The story was not particularly interesting—an absurd tale of a husband and wife who had quarreled. It was, of course, perfectly unnecessary for people who loved each other to quarrel, Betty Graham insisted to herself, and yet the writer did not seem convinced of this fact. Toward the close of the story she grew more interested and excited.

Then, without actually hearing a sound or seeing a figure, Betty suddenly looked up, and there in the open doorway of the library stood a strange man. Like a flash her mind worked. She was alone on the first floor of a big, rambling old house and

uncertain of how late the hour. Must she at once cry for help, or should she try to get across the floor and ring the bell furiously?—for that would be more certain to be heard. Yet for the moment her knees felt absurdly weak and her hands cold. However, with a stupendous effort Betty now summoned her courage, of which the shock of the moment had robbed her. For her Camp Fire training had taught her the proper spirit in which to meet emergencies. Quietly Mrs. Graham rose up from her chair.

"What is it you wish? I think you have made some mistake," she remarked stiffly. For in spite of her terror the man in the doorway did not look like an ordinary thief. Besides, if he were a thief why did he remain there staring at her? Why had he not committed his burglary and gotten away with his spoils without alarming her?

But he was now advancing a few steps toward her and there was no light in the library, except from the reading lamp.

"Anthony!" Betty cried instinctively, although she knew that the Governor could not be in the house at the time, else he would have come straight to her.

Then to her immense amazement, almost to her stupefaction, the intruder actually smiled.

"Betty," he answered, "or rather Mrs. Graham, have I startled you? Yes, I know it is dreadfully informal, my coming upon you in this fashion and not even allowing your butler to announce me. But I ran down from New York today to spend the night with Meg and Jack Emmet. A few moments ago we began talking of you. Well, as I've got to go back to town in the morning I decided that nothing would give me more pleasure than seeing the wife of our distinguished new Governor, so here I am!"

Positively the stranger was holding out his hand.

Moreover, the next instant Betty had laid her cold fingers inside it.

"John, John Everett, how ridiculous of me not to have recognized you! Yet, though I was thinking of you, you were the last person in the world I expected to see at present. And I confess you frightened me." Betty made her visitor a little curtsey. "Remember how you boys used

to try to terrify us when we were in camp just to prove the superiority of Boy Scouts over Camp Fire girls? I would not have been frightened then! But do let us have more light so that we can really see each other."

Betty touched the electric button and the room was suddenly aglow.

Then she again faced her companion. It had been foolish of her not to have recognized her old friend, John Everett. He did look a good deal older, but he was a large, handsome man with blond hair, blue eyes and a charming manner. Moreover, he was undoubtedly returning Betty's glance with undisguised admiration.

"You won't mind my saying it, will you, Mrs. Graham, but you are more stunning than ever. I suppose it sounds a little impertinent of me, but you know even though I always thought you tremendously pretty as a girl, really I never believed——" John began.

Betty shook her head reproachfully and yet perhaps she was a little pleased, even though she recognized her visitor's compliment as extravagant.

Motioning to another chair, she then sat down in her former one. For a few moments there was a kind of constraint in the atmosphere, such as one often feels in meeting again an old friend with whom one has been intimate in former years and not seen in a long time.

Under her lashes Betty found herself studying her visitor's face. At first she did not think that he appeared much discouraged by his misfortunes, but the next moment she was not so sure.

"I am awfully pleased the world has gone so well with you, Mrs. Graham," John Everett began, to cover the awkwardness of the silence. "You were a wise girl to have known that Anthony had so much more in him than the rest of us fellows. I hear he is making things hum in the state of New Hampshire."

Betty looked a little shocked. "Oh, I did not care for Anthony because I thought him cleverer than other people. I—oh, does one ever know exactly why one cares? But do tell me about yourself, John. You don't mind my knowing of your present difficulty? Meg has just told me, but

I am sure things will be all right soon again."

Half an hour later the young Governor, coming in very tired from his long day's work, seeing the light burning in the library, walked quickly toward the door. He was worn out and hungry and wanted nothing so much as supper and quiet talk with his wife. For Anthony had never gotten over the pleasure he felt at returning home to find her there to receive him. Already it seemed ages since he had said good-bye at breakfast.

However, just before he arrived at the open door he heard the sound of Betty's laughter and some one answering her.

Of course it was selfish and absurd of him to feel a sudden sense of disappointment. He knew that he should have been glad to find Betty entertained.

Before entering the library the new Governor managed to assume a more hospitable expression. He was also surprised at finding John Everett their caller. But then he too had known him in their boyhood days in Woodford and was glad to see him. Certainly they had never been

friends as boys. The young Governor could still remember that John had then seemed to have all the things he had wanted as a boy—good looks, good family, money enough for a college education. Yet with all these advantages John had not been able to win Betty. Now was Anthony's chance to feel sorry for him. Lately he too had heard that John Everett was in some kind of business trouble. He hoped that this was not true.

Therefore it was Anthony who insisted that their visitor should remain with them while they had a little supper party in the library. And Betty was glad to see that her old friend was making a good impression upon her husband. For she was now firmly determined to ask Anthony to give John Everett a fine position at once.

CHAPTER VI

The First Disillusion

"BUT you can't mean, Anthony, that you positively refuse to do what I ask?"

It was a little after midnight and Betty and Anthony were up-stairs in their own apartment. Betty had on a blue dressing gown and her hair was braided and hung over her shoulders. But her cheeks were flushed, her gray eyes dark with temper and her voice trembled in spite of her effort to keep it still.

Undeniably Anthony appeared both obstinate and worried. Moreover, he was extremely sleepy and yet somehow Betty must be made to understand before either of them could rest. Never before had he dreamed that she could be so unreasonable.

"I don't think that is exactly a fair way of stating the thing, Betty," the young Governor answered gently enough. "You see, I have tried to explain to you, dear, that I

can't give positions to friends just as though running the affairs of the state was my private business. I could afford to take risks with that if I wished, but you know I promised when I was elected Governor only to make appointments of the best men I could find."

If possible, the Governor's wife looked even more unconvinced. She was sitting in a big blue chair almost the color of her wrapper, and every now and then rocked back and forth to express her emotion, or else tapped the floor mutinously with the toe of her bedroom slipper.

"You talk as if there was something wrong with John Everett," she answered argumentatively, "and as if I were asking you to give a position to a man who was stupid or dishonest. I am perfectly sure John is none of these things. He has been unfortunate in business lately, of course, but that might happen to any one. Really, Anthony, would you mind telling me exactly what you have in your mind against John Everett? Of course, I remember you never liked him when you were boys, but I thought you were too big a man——"

"See here, Betty," the Governor interrupted, "can't we let this subject drop? I never knew you to be like this before." He had thrown himself down on a couch, but now reached over and tried to take his wife's reluctant hand. "I've been explaining to you for the past hour that I have nothing in the world against John Everett personally, except that he has no training for the kind of work I need men to do. He has been a Wall Street broker. Well, that is all right, but what does he know about prison reform, about building good roads for the state, or anything else I'm after? Just because he is your friend—our friend, I mean—I can't thrust him into a good job over the heads of better men. Please look at this as I do, Betty. I hate desperately to refuse your request and I know Meg will be hurt with me too and think I'm unfaithful to old times. Heigh-ho, I wonder if anybody thinks being Governor is a cheerful job? Good-night, Princess."

Plainly meaning to end their conversation, Anthony had gotten up from his sofa. He now stood above Betty, waiting to have

her make peace with him. But Betty looked far from peaceful, more like a spoiled and angry little girl thwarted in a wish which she had not imagined could be refused.

Of course the Princess had always been more or less spoiled all her life. Her friends in the Camp Fire Club and her family had always acknowledged this. But she was usually reasonable with the sweetest possible temper, so that no one really minded. Nevertheless Betty was not accustomed to having her serious wishes denied, and by her husband of all people!

Really she would have liked very much to cry with disappointment and vexation, except that she was much too proud. Moreover, even now she could not finally accept the idea that Anthony would not eventually do as she asked.

But she drew back coldly from any idea of making friends until then.

"Good-night," she replied indifferently. "I don't think I shall try to go to sleep." Her voice trembled now in spite of all her efforts.

"Really, Anthony, I don't know how I

can tell Meg and John that you have declined to do what I have asked you. I wonder what they will think? Certainly that I haven't any influence with my own husband! Do you know, Anthony, perhaps I am wrong, but I thought I had helped you a little in your election. I've made a good many sacrifices; you have to leave me alone a greater part of the time because you are too busy to spend much of your time with me. Well, I have never thought of complaining, but somehow it does seem to me that I have the right to have you do just this one thing I ask of you. I'm afraid I don't find being a Governor's wife so very cheerful either."

While she was talking Betty had also gotten up and was now standing near the doorway. As her husband came toward her she moved slowly backward.

"I say, Betty dear, you are hard on a fellow," Anthony protested. "Of course I owe my job to you and anything else that is good about me. But you can't want me to do wrong even for your sake. Maybe you may see things differently tomorrow."

However, instead of replying, the Gov-

ernor's wife slipped outside the room. In the nursery she lay down by Bettina. But she slept very little for the rest of the night.

For in her opinion Anthony had not been fair; he had not even been kind. A few hours before, when she had assured John and Meg of her sympathy and aid, she could not have believed this possible. This was the first time in their married life that her husband had refused her anything of importance. Surely she had been wrong in suggesting or even thinking for half a second that his old boyish dislike and jealousy of John Everett could influence Anthony now! It was an absurd idea, and even a horrid one; and yet is one ever altogether fair in anger?

Down-stairs, in spite of his fatigue, Anthony Graham walked up and down their big room for a quarter of an hour. If he only could have reconciled it with his conscience to do what Betty asked him, how much easier and how much more cheerful for both of them! She was right in saying that he owed something to her. He owed everything. It was not just that she had helped him since his marriage—most wives

do that for their husbands—but she had helped him from that first hour of their meeting in the woods so many years before.

Nevertheless he had given his word to keep his faith as Governor of the state. He had promised to give no one a position because of pull and influence. Naturally he had not expected his wife to have any part in this, but only the politicians and seekers after graft. Yet even with Betty misunderstanding he must try to keep his word.

Sighing, the young Governor turned out the lights. He did look too boyish and delicate for the weight of his responsibilities tonight. For there had been other troubles in his office which he had wished to confide to his wife, had she only been willing to listen. However, he finally fell asleep somewhat comforted. For he was convinced that Betty was too sensible a woman not finally to see things in the light that he did. When he had the opportunity and she was neither tired nor vexed with him he would explain to her all over again.

An uncomfortable spirit, however, seemed to be brooding over the Governor's man-

sion this evening, for in another part of the big house, there was another argument also lasting far into the night.

Angel and Faith sat on either side an old-fashioned four-poster bed, often talking at the same time in the way that only feminine creatures can.

In her white cashmere kimono over her gown, with her pale hair unbound, Faith Barton looked like a little white saint. But alas, and in spite of her name, the little French girl bore no resemblance to one!

Angel's dark hair was extraordinarily heavy and curly but not very long, and now in her uneasiness she had pushed and pulled at it until it was extremely untidy. Moreover, her black eyes now and then flashed resentfully at her friend and two bright spots of color burned in her cheeks. When she was not talking her lips were pressed closely together.

"Faith, it isn't right of you; you know it isn't. You should not have made me promise to keep your secret before telling me it. How could I ever have guessed such a dreadful thing! I simply must, must tell Betty if you are not going to

confide in Mrs. Barton. Then Betty can do what she thinks best and it will be off my conscience."

Certainly Angelique Martins was not speaking in an amiable tone, and yet her companion seemed not in the slightest disturbed.

Indeed, Faith began quietly brushing her long, straight hair.

"Don't be a goose, Angel, and don't have so much conscience for other people. Of course, I am sorry I told you. Kenneth said it would be wiser not to speak to any one for the present, but I had to have some confidant. Now you are trying to spoil my first real romance by wanting me to get up and proclaim it on the housetops. What I like most about being engaged to Kenneth is that no one knows of it and that we can see each other without a lot of silly people staring and talking about us. Of course, when we begin to think about being married I shall tell Rose everything. Then I know she will understand. But we are not going to be married for a long, long time, I expect. Kenneth says that nothing would persuade

him to marry me until he could give me everything in the world I want. Oh, you need not look so superior, Angel; I understand you don't approve of that sentiment, but I think it is beautiful for a man to feel that way about a girl. You simply can't appreciate Kenneth." And Faith looked sufficiently gentle and forgiving to have tried the patience of a saint.

"Perhaps not," the other girl answered shortly. "Anyhow, Faith, you are right in believing I don't approve of the things you have told me. The idea of your being secretly engaged to a man whom you have only known about two weeks! It is horrid! Naturally you don't either of you know whether you are really in love; but then I don't think you ought to be engaged until you are willing to tell people. Besides, what do you know about Mr. Helm's real character, Faith? He is the kind of fellow who makes love to almost every girl he meets."

Almost under her breath and with her cheeks flaming the little lame French girl made this last speech. Nevertheless her

companion heard her. Still Faith did not appear angry as most girls would have been under the circumstances, but perhaps her gentle, pitying expression was harder to endure.

"Is that what troubles you, Angel? I am so sorry," Faith returned, ceasing to brush her hair to smile compassionately at her friend. "You see, Kenneth warned me that you did not like him very much. He was too kind to explain exactly the reason, only he said that you seemed to have misunderstood something about him. I suppose he was kind to you once, Angel, because of course he would be specially kind to a girl like you. But, there, you need not look so angry! You have a dreadful temper, Angel. Even Betty Graham thinks so in spite of being so fond of you."

With pretended carelessness Faith Barton now glanced away, devoting all her energy to plaiting her long hair. Really her speech had been more unkind than she had intended it. But somehow she and Angel were always having differences of opinion and it seemed to Faith that it

was usually Angel's fault, because she never quarreled with any one else.

Besides, ever since her first meeting with the little French girl at Sunrise Cabin she had been the one who had tried to make and keep their friendship. Angel never seemed to care deeply for any one except her mother and now Mrs. Graham and her babies, and was always getting into hot water with other people.

However, it certainly did not occur to Faith that her own amiability came partly from a lack of interest in any one except herself and partly because her own whims were so seldom interfered with.

Curious that Rose Barton, who had been such a sensible guardian and friend to her group of Camp Fire girls, had been so indulgent to her adopted daughter! But very few persons understood Faith Barton. She seemed to be absolutely gentle and loving and to live always in a world of beautiful dreams and desires. How could any one guess that she was often both selfish and self-willed?

"There is no use talking any more on this subject, Faith, if you think I wish

to interfere because I am jealous of you," Angel declared, and finding her cane slipped down from the bed. "Besides, you know perfectly well you are doing wrong without my saying it. Anyhow, I believe that something will happen to make you sorry enough before you are through."

With this parting shot Angel marched stiffly out of the room, too proud to reveal how deeply her friend had wounded her.

CHAPTER VII

A New Interest

IT is a far journey from the New Hampshire hills to the plains of the West.

Nevertheless a girl whom we once knew at Sunrise Hill is walking alone this afternoon on the rim of a desert and facing the western sun. It is scarcely fair to call her a girl, unless one has the theory that so long as a woman does not marry she retains her girlhood. Yet glancing at her as she strolled slowly along, no one could have guessed her to be more than twenty, though perhaps she was a little nearer the next decade.

Exquisitely dressed in a long, dark green broadcloth coat with a fur collar and small hat, she was a little past medium height and unusually slender. Her hair was so black that it had an almost somber look, and yet her eyes were vividly blue. Just now, having wandered a good many miles from the place where she was stay-

ing, she looked extremely tired and depressed. In no possible way did she appear to fit into her present surroundings, for without a doubt she was a woman of wealth and distinction. It was self-evident in the clothes she wore, but more so in the unconsciously proud carriage of her head and in the lines of her face, which was not beautiful and yet seemed to have some curious charm more appealing than mere beauty.

She stopped now for a moment to gaze with an appreciation that was almost awe at the beauty of the sinking sun. There was a glory of color in the sky that was almost fantastic; piles of white clouds seemed to have been flung up against the horizon like mammoth soap bubbles, tinted with every rainbow shade. With unconscious enthusiasm, the woman clasped her hands together.

"Why," she exclaimed aloud, "I was wondering what this scene reminded me of. It is dear old Sunrise Hill! What would I not give to be there in the old cabin tonight with Betty and Mollie and the others! But they must not know what

has become of me until things are all right again. Both Betty and Mollie are too happy with their babies and husbands to worry over the old maids in the family. Sometimes, though, I feel that I should like to send for Sylvia." Then the wanderer turned and stared around her.

In every direction there were long waving reaches of sand with an occasional clumping of rocks, while growing near them were strange varieties of the cactus plant. Some of them had great leaves like elephants' ears, some were small and thick with queer, stiff hairs and excrescences, and among them, in spite of the lateness of the season, were occasional pink and crimson flowers with waxen petals.

Behind the wayfarer there was a trail which she must have followed from some nearby village, yet it was growing less and less distinct ahead, and certainly the hour was far too late for a stranger to be traveling alone so near a portion of the great Colorado desert.

Nevertheless the young woman at this moment turned and left her path. Walking deliberately for a few yards she

seated herself on a giant rock, and leaning forward, rested her chin in her beautifully gloved hands.

"So like you, Polly O'Neill, even in your old age to have gotten yourself entirely used up on the first walk you were allowed to take alone!" she began aloud, giving a half despairing, half amused shrug of her thin shoulders. "I am not in the least sure that I know the way back to my hotel if it grows dark before I arrive there, and assuredly I am too weary to start for the present. And hungry! Heaven only knows when I was ever so ravenous! Now if I had only been a Camp Fire girl in the West instead of the East, doubtless I could at once discover all sorts of delectable bread fruit and berries growing nearby. But I don't feel I want to run any further risks at present."

So for the next half hour in almost perfect quiet Polly O'Neill remained seated. It would have been impossible for her to have done otherwise, for suddenly a curious attack of exhaustion had swept over her. It was not unusual of late, for indeed Miss O'Neill and her maid

had established themselves in a small hotel near Colorado Springs in order that the well-known actress might recover from an attack of nervous exhaustion which she had suffered during her successful tour in the Western states. So Polly was quite accustomed to finding herself all at once too weary either to move or speak. But quite like the Polly of old she had just deliberately walked five miles without reflecting on her lack of strength or the fact that she must return by as long a road as she had come.

No, in spite of the fact that Polly O'Neill had in the last ten years made a great name for herself as one of the leading actresses in the United States, she was as thoughtless and impetuous as she had been as a girl.

Finally, however, with what seemed to require a good deal of effort she got up and moved, this time toward the east, but all the elasticity had gone from her. The sand was uncomfortably heavy, so that she dragged one foot after the other and her slender body seemed to wave like a stalk in the wind. But the worst of her

difficulty was that her breath came in short, painful gasps. Unconsciously the effort which the business of walking required made Polly pay less strict attention to the path which she should have followed. But by and by, realizing that her way was less plain and that it was now quite dusk, she paused for a moment, put her hand to her side and then again seemed to be considering her situation. Whatever her decision, she must have accepted it philosophically, for this time, more deliberately, she sought another resting place. Fortunately not far away was a better shelter of rocks, half a dozen of them forming a kind of semicircular cave. Deliberately Polly crept toward their shelter and there removed her hat and tied her hair up in a long automobile veil. Then she lay down in the sand with the stones as a shield behind her and before her a wonderful view of the night as it stole softly over the desert.

Polly was not afraid and not even seriously annoyed. Life to her was but a series of adventures, some of them good and others less cheerful. She was not

at all sure that she was not going to enjoy this one and she could not believe that it would do her any especial harm. She was sleeping outdoors for the benefit of her health in a small porch attached to her hotel bedroom. Perhaps the sand was less comfortable and clean than her bed, but then she had never before imagined so much sky and prairie. Moreover, there was no one to worry over her failure to appear except Marie, her maid. It was just possible that Marie might arouse the hotel and a searching party be sent to find her. In that case Polly knew that she would be glad to return to civilization. However, she did not intend to worry if no one came. Her hunger and thirst must be forgotten until morning.

Somehow, when the stars came out, in spite of the beauty of the night Polly found she could not manage to keep her eyes open. She was not exactly sleepy, only tired. For never in years had she had such an opportunity to think things over. How crowded her life had been, how full of hard work, of failure and success, yes, and loneliness! She was willing

to confess it tonight to herself. How she would have liked to have had one of her old Camp Fire friends here in Colorado with her! Yet they were all too busy and she had not wished any one of her family to know how ill she had been. How much trouble she had always given all the people who cared for her ever since she could remember! Polly's conscience pricked her sharply. Why had she not married and settled down as her sister Mollie had suggested at least a hundred times? Because she would not give up her acting? Well, she need not have done this had she married Richard Hunt. But too many years had passed since their engagement had been broken for her to recall him. She had not even seen Mr. Hunt in the past five years, although they had occasionally acted in the same cities and at the same time.

Finally, however, when the famous Miss O'Neill actually fell asleep she was smiling faintly. For a vision had suddenly come to her of how shocked her sister Mollie and her brother-in-law, Mr. William Webster, would be if they knew that she was

sleeping alone on the edge of a desert. But she was surely too near the village to be in any danger from wild animals and no one would undertake such a walk as hers had been at this hour.

Nevertheless, wisdom should have prompted an old Camp Fire girl to have found twigs enough to have started even a miniature camp fire. But the edge of a desert is scarcely the place where wood abounds and the fact is, though she had thought of it, Polly had been too tired to make the necessary effort. For goodness only knows how much farther she need have wandered before coming to an oasis of shrubbery or trees.

When at last Miss O'Neill opened her eyes actually it was broad daylight and standing before her was a figure that almost fitted into her dream. For the girl was just about the age of the group of friends who had once lived together in a log house in the woods, and all night she had been dreaming of Sunrise Cabin.

Nevertheless her visitor bore no other resemblance to them, so that the distinguished lady rubbed her eyes, wondering

if she were yet awake and how the girl could have come so close up to her without her hearing.

A glance explained this, for the intruder was barefooted and her legs and feet were so brown and hard they appeared totally unfamiliar with shoes and stockings.

She was staring so hard at Polly that she seemed scarcely conscious of anything except her own surprise.

With an effort Miss O'Neill sat upright. She did not feel tired now in the least, but gloriously rested and strengthened from her wonderful night out of doors in the clear, pure air. But of course she must explain her situation to the little girl before her, although she would have preferred her discoverer to have explained herself.

In spite of being about fourteen years old, this child had on only a thin yellow calico frock, and it was late October. Her hair was perfectly straight and Polly might have thought her an Indian except that it was light brown in color, although a good deal stained by wind and sun. However, the girl's eyes were a kind of greenish gray in shade and her features were delicately

modeled. But she had a peculiar and not an agreeable expression.

"I wandered away from my hotel last evening and was not able to return, so I slept here all night. How did you happen to find me?" Polly began, feeling that some one must start a conversation in order to persuade her companion to cease her almost frightened staring. Of course Polly appreciated that she herself was not looking her best, but there was no reason why she should excite so much curiosity.

Notwithstanding she received no answer. With a slight gesture of annoyance Miss O'Neill stood up. After all, she did not feel as energetic as she had thought and it was undoubtedly a long walk back to her hotel.

"Do you live anywhere near here? I am both hungry and thirsty. If you could find some one to help me I should be most grateful," Polly said as politely as if she had been speaking to a friend. For if the girl was afraid of her she wished her to forget her timidity.

But instead of replying the strange child stared harder than ever for half a minute,

and then before Polly could speak again or touch her she was off, running across the sand like a deer, without a backward glance.

Miss O'Neill watched her for some time until she vanished into what appeared at this distance to be a clump of trees. Then she deliberately set out to follow her. The child must have come from some place nearer than the village where she was staying. In almost any kind of settlement she would be able to find a horse to take her back to her hotel.

CHAPTER VIII

"Bobbin"

ALL her life Polly O'Neill had felt a curious shrinking from physical cruelty, and growing older had not made the least change in her feeling. She had never talked about it, but had always been fearful that at heart she was a coward. The Camp Fire girls used to laugh at her because, of course, she had learned to do all of the things that their rules required without feeling any possible nervousness. But then no one of them understood what physical cruelty might mean and possibly might never see an exhibition of it.

Yet nothing was farther from her own mind at the present moment than this fear. She had come in about fifteen minutes' walk to a clump of cottonwood trees by a small stream of water, and there in their midst stood a crude two-room shanty with a bare space of ground in front of it and a lean dog sitting in a patch of sunshine.

But the sight that froze Polly's blood and made her stand suddenly so still that she might have been a wooden image was the figure of a man with a long whip in his hand, such as one might have used in driving cattle. And this whip was now whirling and stinging through the air and twisting itself about the body of the little girl who had been the first vision that Miss O'Neill's eyes had rested upon on waking that morning.

But the strangest thing of all was that the child was making no outcry and showing no effort to run away. Indeed, she stood perfectly still, hugging half a loaf of bread in her arms.

Polly made an inarticulate sound which she thought was a loud cry: "Stop!" But the man had not seen her approach and was too occupied with his hateful task to hear her, and to her intense shame she felt all at once desperately afraid of him. She was so far from any one she knew, she had so little physical strength and this man was so much more brutal than any one she had ever seen before in her life. Perhaps he would cease hurting the child this instant.

Then, without in the least knowing when nor how she had accomplished it, Polly rushed forward and seizing the man's thick wrist in her own slender fingers, clung to him desperately, while the thong of the whip curled and fell in a limp fashion about her own shoulders.

Too surprised to speak, the man took a step or two backward. In the course of her stage career Polly had acted a number of tragedy queens; and notwithstanding her slightly rumpled appearance at this moment, she had never looked the part better than now. Her thin figure was drawn up to its fullest height, her Irish blue eyes flashed Celtic lightnings. She even stamped her foot imperiously.

"You beast!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by striking a little girl in that cruel fashion? I'll have you arrested! I don't care in the least if you are her father or what she has done, you have no possible right to be so brutal."

The man had dropped his whip to the ground and Polly now stooped and picked it up. It was absurd of her ever to have dreamed she could have been frightened by

mere brute strength. The man was a good deal more afraid of her for the instant. The sudden apparition of a fashionably dressed young woman, appearing out of nowhere and springing upon him in such a surprising fashion, had destroyed his nerve.

"I wasn't doin' nawthin I hadn't a right ter," he growled. "That young 'un is allers stealin' somethin'. I caught her red-handed running off with that there loaf of bread."

For the first time since her arrival on the scene Polly O'Neill turned toward the girl. She was still staring at her with almost the same expression she had worn earlier in the day. But somehow something in her look touched Polly, brought her sudden inspiration.

"Why," she exclaimed with a break in her voice, "I believe she was bringing the bread to me. I told her I was hungry just a little while ago."

There was no one in the world who could be sweeter or simpler than Polly O'Neill when her feelings were deeply touched. This had always been true, even as a young girl, and of course, as she had grown into a famous woman, her charm had deepened.

Now she put her arms about her new friend's shoulders. "You were going to give the bread to me, I'm sure. Thank you." Oblivious of the fact that the little girl's dress was exceedingly dirty and that her face was far from clean, Polly leaned over and kissed her.

Then she turned to the man. "If you will get a horse and drive me to my hotel I will pay you well for it," she explained.

In reply the man nodded and moved away, so that Polly was once more left alone with the girl.

It suddenly occurred to her that the child had never spoken since their meeting. Could she possibly be deaf and dumb? That might explain her strange expression.

"What is your name?" Polly asked gently.

Still the girl stared. Miss O'Neill repeated her question.

Then the girl, picking up a stick from the ground, slowly and laboriously printed in big letters, such as a child of six might have made, the word "Bobbin."

"Bobbin?" Polly repeated the name aloud as she read it. What an extraordi-

nary title! One could scarcely call it a name.

"Is that the only name you have?" she inquired again, wondering at the same time how it was possible for the little girl to understand what she said without being able to reply. But Bobbin bowed her head, showing that she had understood. In some fashion she must have learned the lip language. Yet it was curious why if the girl had ever been sent to school she had learned nothing else. She appeared the veriest little savage that ever lived so close to wealth and civilization.

Polly sought in her mind to find out what she could do or say to show her gratitude. She had a sudden feeling that she could not turn her back upon the girl and leave her to her wretched fate, and yet of course the child had no claim upon her. It was something in the expression of Bobbin's eyes that seemed to haunt one.

With a slight, unnoticeable shrug of her shoulders, as though giving up the problem as too much for her, Polly now slipped her hand into her pocket, drawing out her purse bag. Opening it she found a

large silver dollar, such as one uses in the West.

"Won't you buy yourself something from me?" she asked, trying to speak as distinctly as possible. She had not observed that in taking out the money she had carelessly dropped a handkerchief from her bag.

With a fleeting expression of pleasure the girl accepted the gift, but the next instant, when Polly turned to watch the man who was now approaching her with a lean horse hitched to a cart, she swooped down toward the ground and picking up the crumpled white object thrust it secretively inside her dress.

Five minutes after, when Polly and the man had started for Colorado Springs, Bobbin remained in the same position, watching them until they were out of sight. Then she began eating the neglected bread.

Upon arriving safely at her hotel, Miss O'Neill discovered that the news of her disappearance had been spread abroad by her frightened maid, and that a thorough search was being made for her. For although Polly had been trying to live as quietly as possible in a small, obscure hotel,

the fact of her visit was well known to hundreds of people. You see, at this time in her life not only was her name celebrated from one part of the country to the other, but her face was equally familiar.

Through her maid, Marie, Polly was told that a gentleman, whose name she had not learned, had been particularly kind and interested in seeking to find her. So as soon as she rested she had every intention of inquiring his name and thanking him personally. But by late afternoon, when she finally dressed, this was impossible. Evidently the man did not wish to be annoyed by her thanks, for the message brought her was that on hearing of her safety he had suddenly left the village.

However, Polly was able to acquire some actual information about the girl she had seen earlier in the day, for "Bobbin" was apparently a well-known character in the famous Westen resort. She was a little stray daughter of the place. Years before, the mother had come to Colorado from some city in the South and had died. Afterwards no one had ever claimed the child.

So the town had taken care of her, sent

her to school and tried to teach her to talk. She was perhaps not entirely deaf, although no one exactly understood her case. But the girl was a hopeless little rebel. In no place would she stay unless kept there by iron bars. She seemed to have an unconquerable desire to be always out of doors, and in the brilliant Colorado climate this was nearly always possible. Recently she had been living with some gypsy people, who had established themselves in a temporary shanty at some little distance from the roads usually followed by sightseers. So Miss O'Neill had certainly wandered from the beaten track. Nevertheless she need not make herself unnecessarily unhappy over "Bobbin," for the girl would again be brought back to school as soon as she could be captured.

Yes, her name had been Roberta, an old-fashioned Southern name, and then in some way it had been shortened to Bobbie and now Bobbin. The child had a last name, of course, but the woman who told the story to Miss O'Neill had either never heard the mother's name or else had completely forgotten it.

Late that night in reflecting over her adventure Polly wished that she and Betty Graham could have changed places for a week or so. For Betty would certainly do something for the unfortunate Bobbin to make life happier for her, as she had a kind of genius for looking after people. Her Camp Fire training had taught her a beautiful sympathy and understanding. But Betty must have been made that way in the beginning, Polly concluded with a sigh and a smile. She had no such gift herself. The girl's story, fragmentary as it was, interested her, but there could be no possible point in undertaking to interfere with the child's future.

Nevertheless, try as she might, all night it was impossible for the famous actress to get the half tragic, half stupid figure of Bobbin out of her vision.

CHAPTER IX

Back in New Hampshire

BETTY was driving alone through one of the less crowded parts of Concord. She had been into the country and was now on her way home again. Not very often did she go out alone, but she had not felt in a mood for company and had purposely gotten away by herself.

A week had passed since her midnight talk with Anthony and there was still a coldness between them. Each day Betty had expected her husband to declare that he had changed his mind in regard to finding a position for John Everett and would do as she asked. Yet so far he had not even referred to the subject.

On her way home Betty considered that she had better stop and tell Meg how she had failed in influence with her husband, notwithstanding she could not decide just what she should do or say. Meg would not understand and might believe that

she had made no real effort for John's sake. Yet she could not be such a coward as to leave her old friends in suspense. Since Anthony would do nothing to help, it was better that John Everett should know, so that he might find another occupation.

They were passing through a quiet street shaded by magnificent old maple trees that were now bare except for a few clustering brown leaves, when Mrs. Graham leaned over to speak to her coachman and the man drew in his horses. The next moment her attention was attracted by seeing some one on the sidewalk pause and lift his hat to her. Betty had returned the bow before she actually recognized John Everett. Then he took two or three steps forward and held out his hand.

"I was just going to see Meg," Betty explained, blushing and wishing that she could escape the confession that lay before her. If John should question her now she felt she might have a sudden panic of embarrassment. Of course she could think up some excuse for Anthony's unkindness; she might even offer the same excuse he had made to her. Yet the fact that he had de-

clined to do what she so much desired would remain the same.

But John Everett was smiling in the most ordinary fashion.

"I wonder, Mrs. Graham, if you will not let me ride along with you, if you are going to Meg's. I am on the way home myself."

Then in a short while Betty had forgotten her worry and was having the same agreeable talk of old times that she had enjoyed the week before. Moreover, it was John Everett who relieved her from her chagrin.

"By the way," he began, just as they were about to arrive at Mrs. Jack Emmet's house, "please don't worry, Mrs. Graham, or Betty, if I may call you by the old name, about asking your husband to fix me up with a position in his office. I know the new Governor is being overwhelmed with office seekers. I have been lucky enough to secure something to do with my brother-in-law, Jack Emmet, and ex-Governor Peyton. They have a new business scheme on hand in which they think I may be useful."

Of course, Betty could not utter her

thanksgiving aloud, although she repeated it very fervently to herself. So, after all, she need not confess to other people Anthony's lack of consideration. It was enough that she should be carrying the hurt feeling about inside her own heart. Instead, she merely murmured something or other that was not clear, about the Governor's having been so very busy recently and having some special annoyance in his affairs. She was by no means certain of just what she said at the moment nor how she explained the situation, but fortunately John Everett did not appear to be particularly interested in the subject.

Meg was not at home when they arrived, but instead of saying good-bye, John suggested that he should drive back to her own home with Betty. It had been years since they had seen each other, except the other evening, and there was so much to talk about.

Then John explained that he had taken a small house in Concord and that his father was soon coming to live with him. Bumps would continue with his course at Cornell for this winter anyhow. So, after

all, there were uses in this world even for old bachelors, he ended smilingly.

It was Betty, however, who suggested that they should go and see this house, although John told her it was a good deal out of her way. Yet it was a beautiful warm November afternoon and would not be dark for another hour. Somehow Betty did not feel that she wanted to go home at once. Faith had gone for a walk with Kenneth Helm, Angel had a half holiday and was spending the afternoon with the children. She and Bettina had a wonderful secret game that they played together in a room by themselves, where no one else had ever been allowed to come. There was no prospect of Anthony's returning home for some time, so the Governor's splendid mansion would seem big and empty to the Governor's wife for an hour or so more at any rate.

There was a caretaker in the little white house with green shutters, who was anxious to show Mrs. Graham and Mr. Everett every detail of it. The house was to be let furnished and yet it seemed to have been peculiarly fitted for old Professor Everett's

needs. It was pleasant for Betty to imagine the sweet-tempered, learned old man here with John and near his daughter Meg. He had been living alone in Woodford ever since his younger son, Horace, departed for college. Somehow Betty felt that it would be pleasant for her also to have the old gentleman living so near by. He had been a devoted friend of Mr. Ashton's, whom she had certainly loved even more than an own father.

"I shall be running in here very often to see Professor Everett and tell him the things that trouble me, just as Meg and I used to do when we were little girls," Betty remarked to her companion. "He was the one person who never by any possible chance believed that Meg or I could ever be in fault."

"I'm sure he will always be overjoyed to see you," John Everett replied. "Only it is a little difficult for me to imagine Mrs. Anthony Graham ever having anything to trouble her."

As the November evenings grew dark so soon, it was almost dusk when Betty at length entered her own home after saying

good-bye to her friend, who had insisted on walking back to his sister's house instead of allowing the coachman to drive him.

Going into her private sitting room, Betty was surprised to find that Anthony had come home and was sitting there pretending to read. But most undeniably he looked cross.

"I thought we were going to have a drive and tea together, Betty," he remarked reproachfully. "Where in the world have you been? No one seemed to know. I should think you would leave word where you are going, so that if anything happened to the children or to me the servants would know where to find you."

Actually Anthony was reproaching her in a perfectly unreasonable fashion! Betty could hardly believe her ears, it was so unlike him. Was he going to turn into the dictatorial type of husband after all these years of married life when he had been so altogether different?

Usually Betty's temper was gracious and sweet. Possibly if Anthony had approached her in his usual fashion at this moment they might have gotten over the

CHAPTER X

Loneliness

NEVER in her entire career had Polly O'Neill felt more depressed. She was, of course, accustomed to a very busy life filled with people and excitement. Nothing else is possible to an actor or actress, although Miss O'Neill had tried to keep her private life as quiet as possible.

But here in her little hotel about a mile or more from the celebrated Colorado ings she was finding existence duller office s had bargained for. In the first should have arrival she had let it be known I have been hav no callers or acquaintances. with John Everett. ing up her work at the was not worth while f at she was greatly in you by asking you to so visitors to the giving John something at at her word and me he is going into bus eft to recover her Emmet and ex-Governor F and then some as she moved toward her peared at her

hotel or sent books and flowers. Nevertheless, she had so far made no acquaintances.

However, after several weeks of the wonderful, brilliant air, with nothing to do except sleep and write an occasional letter, Polly felt a good deal stronger. Yet she did not feel that she was well enough to return to Woodford, and today the news from home had been depressing.

You see, Mollie had never been told that her sister was ill and considered that if she only required rest it might as well be enjoyed at her own lovely big farm as among strangers in the West. So this morning her letter had urged Polly's return home and had also imparted a great variety of dispiriting reasons. In the first place, Mollie told at great length that Dan, who was Polly's favorite of her sister's children, was not in good health and that he was showing certain oddities of disposition which struck his aunt as very like her own. Indeed, she believed that neither her sister nor brother-in-law understood the delicate, difficult little fellow, and she would have liked to have been near enough to have helped him

through a trying time. Then more disquieting had been Mollie's information about their mother, Mrs. Wharton, who was beginning to show her age. Moreover, Mr. Wharton seemed somewhat depressed over his business affairs. Then finally the most mystifying and in a way disturbing of Mollie's statements had been her account of Betty Graham.

For several weeks there had been no line to Polly from her dearest friend, which in itself had made Polly vaguely uneasy. It was so unlike Betty ever to fail in her weekly letter which had always followed her friend to whatever part of the world she happened to be. But now Mollie announced that Betty had been on a visit to her mother, Mrs. Ashton, in Woodford, and that she had seemed entirely unlike herself. Instead of having a great deal to say she had been strangely quiet, almost sad.

Moreover, the new Governor's enemies were said to be making a tremendous effort to destroy his reputation and there was a great deal of talk going on about some matter which Mollie did no claim to under-

stand. Possibly Anthony's annoyances may have been worrying his wife.

Polly had been sitting alone on her small, private veranda which commanded a wonderful view of a rim of hills, when her sister's letter had been given her along with her other mail.

Before glancing at the other communications she had eagerly opened this. But now she sat with the pages fluttering in her lap and her eyes filled with tears.

Naturally Mollie had not intended to be so depressing; people seldom do seem to realize just what effects their letters may produce. Often they write merely to relieve their own feelings and once having put down all the gloomy possibilities that worry them at the time, rise up and go cheerfully about their business with the evils forgotten.

So naturally it remains for the unfortunate recipient of the letter to become even more depressed than the writer had been.

Moreover, Polly really wanted desperately to go home. It had been many months since she had seen her own people,

and though they often believed her to have less affection than other women, it was not in the least true. She had given up many things for her art and had sometimes seemed selfish and cold-blooded. But it wasn't fair that her sister, Mollie, always seemed to think that she had never desired a home of her own, babies and some one to care for her supremely, that she had never grown tired of the wandering life her stage career forced her to lead.

Finally, however, Polly managed to smile and give a characteristic shrug over her own self-pity. There was nothing in the world so silly. Like the rest of us she knew this to be true, yet, like the rest of us, now and then even this famous, grown-up woman, who had most of the things that people would give worlds to possess, indulged in attacks of being sorry for herself. Moreover, the day before she had sent for her doctor and he had positively refused to consider her leaving Colorado for the present.

You may remember that Polly had a certain inherited delicacy that used to keep her mother uneasy, and lately it had

troubled her. It was this fact she had concealed from her family and friends, so that now, though she was better, her physician had scouted the idea of a return East. Once near New York he was sure she would begin to talk business with her theatrical manager, or even undertake to study a new play.

No, she must undoubtedly remain at her post a while longer. And yet was it really necessary to have her post quite so lonely?

Just as this idea occurred to her, a slight noise attracting her attention, Polly glanced down into the garden below her veranda.

There stood Bobbin and the next moment she had flung a poor little bouquet at her feet. It was a strange offering, all prickly cactus leaves with a single white flower in their midst. For some absurd reason it flashed through Polly's mind to wonder if her offering could be in any way symbolic of the girl who had given it her. Could there be something beautiful hidden within the child's peculiarities?

For this was not the first token of affection that Bobbin had presented. In-

deed, many queer, small gifts had been brought to the strange lady since their first meeting, so that Polly had been curiously touched. For of course Bobbin's offerings came straight from her heart. In her pathetic, shut-in world she had no way of knowing anything of the history of the woman whom she so plainly admired.

Yet inside Polly O'Neill's sitting room at this moment there were four or five tokens of affection that must have come from her. They were too extraordinary for any one else to have sent them and had been laid at her shrine in too unusual a way. For most of them had been literally flung on her veranda. A few of them, when she happened to be sitting outdoors as she was doing at the present moment, and the others when no one had seen or known of their appearance.

One of the gifts was a beautiful blue feather that must have fallen from some unusual bird flying over the western lands, another a stone that shone like the finest crystal, in the sun, and a third a horseshoe some small broncho must have shed in trotting across the plains.

However, never once had Polly been able to thank her new friend for her gifts. For always at the slightest movement on her part Bobbin had turned and run away more fleetly than any one else could. For since Miss O'Neill's report that she had found the girl living with such rough people Bobbin had been recaptured and brought back to the village to school. Notwithstanding, she had once more escaped and now either no one knew just where she had gone or else no one had taken the trouble to capture her a second time.

It occurred to Polly at this moment that she would like to try and influence the girl, or at any rate show her gratitude. Besides, anything would be better than spending the rest of the day bewailing her own loneliness. Moreover, it would do her good for a moment to compare her own loneliness with Bobbin's!

Without a movement or a sign to the girl to betray that she had even caught sight of her, Polly at once slipped into her bedroom and put on her coat and hat. And she was down in her yard and had stretched out her hand to touch her

visitor before the girl became aware of her.

Yet the very next instant Bobbin started and began running as swiftly as she had at their first meeting. And this time, even more impetuously and with less reason, Miss O'Neill pursued her.

It was ridiculous of Polly and utterly undignified and unbecoming. No other person in the world in her position would have done such a thing. Yet she had no more thought of its oddity and the attention that she might create than if she had been a Camp Fire girl in the New Hampshire woods nearly fifteen years before.

Of course the woman could not run half so fast as Bobbin in these days, but it was only because she was not well, Polly said to herself angrily. She had been the swiftest runner of all the girls for short distances in their old Sunrise Hill Club. Of course Sylvia had used to get the better of her in long distance tests. Still, even now she was managing to keep Bobbin in sight, although she had a horrid stitch in her side and was already out of breath.

Fortunately, however, for Miss Polly

O'Neill's reputation she was not at the present time within the fashionable precincts of Colorado Springs, else she might possibly have been thought to have gone suddenly mad. Her hotel was some distance out in the country and there were but few houses in its neighborhood. Moreover, Bobbin was running away from the town and not toward it.

The road was a level, hard one, but all at once Polly felt a queer pain that took her breath completely away and then a sudden darkness.

She did not fall, however, because some one who was walking in the direction of her hotel reached her just in time.

Then to her amazement Polly heard an exclamation that had in some unexplainable way a familiar note in it. The next moment when straightening up and opening her eyes she seemed to be reposing in the arms of a tall man with dark eyes and gray hair, whom she had once known extremely well, but had not seen in the past five years.

CHAPTER XI

A Meeting and an Explanation

"I—I was running," explained Miss O'Neill as soon as she had sufficient breath to speak.

Which was such an absurdly unnecessary statement of an apparent fact that her rescuer smiled against his will.

He was not pleased at this meeting with Miss Polly O'Neill. It was true that he had been walking out to her hotel to make inquiries concerning her health, but he had no thought or desire to see her. Indeed, deep down in his heart he believed that few women had ever treated a man much worse than she had treated him and he had never even tried to forgive her. For several years they had been engaged to be married, only postponing the wedding because of Polly's youth and because she wanted to go on with her acting for a few years longer without interruption. Then when Richard Hunt

had insisted that he was not young and could not wait forever, with characteristic coolness Polly had broken her engagement. She had written him of her change of mind and heart and he had accepted her letter as final. Never once since had they met face to face until this minute.

Yet now Richard Hunt found himself holding the same young woman in his arms, rather against his will, of course, but not knowing what else to do with her since she scarcely looked strong enough to stand alone.

"I think I would like to sit down for a moment," Polly volunteered finally and managed to cross over to the opposite side of the road, where she established herself very comfortably on a carefully cultivated mound of grass.

Her rescuer stood over her. "May I do anything for you, Miss O'Neill?" he inquired formally. "I think it might be well for me to find your maid."

He was about to move off when Polly with her usual lack of dignity fairly clutched the back of his overcoat.

"Oh, please don't go, Mr. Hunt—Rich-

ard," she ended after a slight hesitation. "Really, I don't understand why you have treated me so unkindly all these years. I don't see the least reason why we should not have continued to be friends. Still, you were going to my hotel to call on me. There isn't any other possible reason why you were marching out this particular road, which does not lead anywhere else." And at this Miss O'Neill smiled with open and annoying satisfaction.

"I hadn't the faintest idea of asking to see you," Richard Hunt announced firmly, although a little surprised by Polly's friendly manner. If they had been parted for a matter of five weeks instead of five years, and if the cause of their separation had been only some slight disagreement rather than something affecting their whole lives, she could not have appeared more nonchalant and at the same time more cordial. But then there never had been any way of accounting for Polly O'Neill's actions and probably never would be. However, Richard Hunt had no desire again to subject himself to her moods. He wished very much to walk on, and yet he could not

make up his mind to remove her hand forcibly from his coat. Moreover, she looked too pale and exhausted to be left alone. Yet this had always been a well-known method by which Polly had succeeded in gaining her own point, he remembered.

"Then what were you going to my hotel for? Didn't you even know I was staying there?" she demanded, finding breath enough to ask questions, in spite of her exhaustion of a few moments before.

If only he had been a less truthful man! For a moment Richard Hunt contemplated making up some entirely fanciful story, then he put the temptation aside.

Notwithstanding, his manner and answer were far more crushing to Miss Polly O'Neill than if he had told her a lie which she would probably have seen through at once.

Always he had commanded more respect from her than any man she had ever known in her life, which was secretly mingled with a little wholesome awe. Polly had always put it down to the fact that he was so much older than she was. But she had had other acquaintances among older men.

"You misunderstood me, Miss O'Neill, when I said that I was coming to your hotel without any intention of seeing you. That was true, but I was coming with the idea of inquiring how you were. You see, I also have been staying in this part of the country, and not long ago I read in one of the papers that you were here and seriously ill. Afterwards I learned that you were alone. Your family and friends have always been so kind to me that it appeared to me my duty to find out your true condition. I of course guessed that you had not told them the truth."

Richard Hunt gazed severely down at the crumpled young woman at his feet, ending his speech as cruelly as possible.

"Well, I like that!" Polly returned weakly, falling into slang with entire unconsciousness. "Here I have been suffering perfect agonies of loneliness and crying my eyes out every day because I so wanted mother and Mollie and Betty to come to me. And I only did not let them know I was ill, to keep them from worrying. Yet you make it sound just as if I were keeping my tiresome old breakdown a secret from

the pure love of fibbing inherent in my wicked nature. I do think you are—mean!"

Was there ever such another grown-up woman as Polly O'Neill? Actually there were tears in her eyes as she ended her speech, relinquishing her hold on her companion in order to fish about in her pocket for a handkerchief, which she failed to find.

With entire gravity Mr. Hunt presented his, and Polly, wiping her eyes and perspiring forehead, coolly retained the handkerchief.

"Don't you think you are strong enough now to permit me to take you back to your hotel, if I may not look for your maid?" the man suggested, wondering if his companion had any idea of how absurd their position was, nor of how much he desired to get away from her.

However, she only sighed comfortably. "Oh, thank you very much, but don't trouble. I am perfectly all right now. I was only out of breath because I was running after a little girl who is as fleet as a deer. But I don't want to go back to my hotel unless you were coming to see me. I was much too lonely there. I'll just walk along with you and after a while, if I am tired

again, perhaps we may find a bench and you'll sit down with me. Of course I know you are too dignified to sit on the grass like I am doing."

Without the least assistance Polly rose up and stood beside her companion, smiling at him somewhat wistfully.

What else could any man do except agree to her wishes? Besides, she had him cornered either way. For now if he continued his journey toward her hotel she would assuredly accompany him, and she had also volunteered to walk the other way.

Moreover, it would seem too surly and disgruntled to refuse so simple a courtesy to an old acquaintance.

So Polly and her former friend walked slowly along in the brilliant Colorado sunshine in air so clear that it seemed almost dazzling. Beyond they could see the tops of snow-covered mountains tinted azure by the sky. It would have been humanly impossible to have felt unfriendly toward any human being in such circumstances and on such a day.

Every now and then Polly would glance surreptitiously toward her companion's face.

Gracious, he did look older! His hair was almost entirely gray and his expression certainly less kind. Polly wondered if he had really minded their broken engagement. Surely he had never cared seriously for so unreliable a person! She must have seemed only a foolish school girl to him, incapable of knowing her own mind. For of course if he had not felt in this way he would have made some effort to persuade her to change her decision. How often she used to lie awake wondering why he did not write or come to her? Well, he was probably grateful enough for his escape by this time.

Then without in the least knowing what she was going to say nor why she said it, Polly inquired suddenly:

"Richard, do you think Margaret Adams is happy in her marriage? I have so often wondered. Of course she writes me she is."

Several years before, Miss Adams had married one of the richest men in New York City and since then had retired permanently from the stage. Indeed, many persons considered that Polly had succeeded to her fame and position.

Richard Hunt shook his head. "Really, I don't know any more than you do, Miss Polly," he returned. "But she has a fine son and certainly looks to me to be happy."

Polly smiled. At least she had succeeded in persuading her companion to call her "Miss Polly." That was a step in the right direction, for in spite of her own boldness in using his first name as she had done years before, up to this moment she had been addressed as Miss O'Neill.

But there were so many things to say that she quite forgot in what way she should say them and talked on every minute of the time.

She had been so lonely, so depressed until now, that life had seemed to have lost almost all its former interest.

When she was plainly too tired to go further Richard Hunt sat down with her on a wayside bench for ten minutes. Then he resolutely rose and said good-bye.

"I am ever so glad to find that you are so much better," he concluded finally. "I see there is no cause for anxiety." Yet even as he spoke the man wondered how any human being could manage to be as

delicate looking as Polly O'Neill and yet do all the things she was able to accomplish? Just now, of course, she did look rather worse than usual for her run; and then the walk afterwards had used up her strength. Besides, she had been trying so hard to persuade her old friend again to cherish a little liking for her and at this moment was convinced of her failure.

She shook her head. "Thank you," she answered quietly. "It has done me good to have seen some one of whom I am fond. It hasn't been altogether cheerful being out here ill and alone. It was kind of you to have cared enough to inquire about me. I suppose you will soon be going back to work. Good luck and farewell."

Polly reached out her slender hand, which was white and small with blue veins upon it. In her haste on leaving her apartment she had, of course, forgotten gloves.

However, instead of shaking her hand quietly, as both of them expected, Richard Hunt raised her fingers to his lips.

"I am not going away from Colorado im-

mediately. May I come and see you soon again?" he inquired. A few minutes before he had not the slightest intention of ever deliberately trying to see Polly O'Neill alone as long as they lived. But she did look so forlorn and as lonely as a forsaken little girl. No one could ever have guessed that this was the celebrated Miss O'Neill whose acting had charmed many thousands of people during the last eight or ten years.

Polly bit her lips. "Then you will come? I was afraid to ask you," she replied. "I want so much to tell you about a queer little girl whom I have come across out in these wilds. Her name is Bobbin and she seems to be deaf and dumb. I feel that I ought to do something for her and don't know exactly what to do. Perhaps I'll adopt her, although I'm afraid the family and Betty Graham won't approve. But anyhow, Sylvia, the well-known Doctor Sylvia Wharton, who is a children's specialist, may be able to do something for her."

Naturally this idea of adopting Bobbin had not dawned upon Polly until the instant of announcing it. But the more she thought of taking the girl to Sylvia's care

the more the idea appealed to her. Besides, Bobbin perhaps might awaken Mr. Hunt's interest if he could see the child and hear her tragic story. The little girl might be made attractive with her queer eyes and sunburned hair, if she were cleaner and more civilized.

"You will come some day and help me decide what to do, won't you?" Polly urged. "One's chief difficulty is not alone that Bobbin won't be adopted, she won't even let herself be discovered. She is such a queer, wild little thing."

Then she watched her companion until he was entirely out of sight and afterwards got up and strolled slowly home.

CHAPTER XII

The Way Home

NOT a long time afterward Bobbin must have changed her mind for some reason or other, for voluntarily she came to call on Miss O'Neill. That is, she appeared in the garden and threw a queer scarlet flower up to the veranda. Then she waited without trying to escape when Polly came down to talk to her. And evidently she must have felt, somewhere back in the odd recesses of her mind, that she was to be considered a visitor, for she had washed her face and hands and even her hair. Indeed, though it hung perfectly straight, Polly thought that she had never seen more splendid hair in her life, it held such strange bright colors from being always exposed to the sun and air; besides, it was long and heavy.

Moreover, Bobbin wore a nold red jacket, which some one recently had given her, over the same pitiful calico dress.

By and by, using all the tact she possessed, Polly persuaded her visitor out of the yard and up-stairs to her own rooms. Of course Marie, the maid, was shocked and displeased, but after all she was fairly accustomed to her mistress's eccentricities. Moreover, after a little while she too became interested in Bobbin. The first thing Polly undertook to do was to feed her visitor. She had an idea that Bobbin might be hungry, but she did not dream how hungry. The girl ate like a little wolf, ravenously, secretly if it had been possible. Only, fortunately, she had learned something of table manners from her occasional training in institutions, so that she at least understood the use of a knife and fork, and altogether her hostess was less horrified than she had expected to be.

Later on Bobbin and Polly undertook to have a conversation. This they managed by acquiring large sheets of paper and nicely sharpened pencils. But it was astonishing how easily Bobbin appeared to understand whatever her new friend said to her and how readily she seemed to be willing to accept her suggestions.

The truth is that the half savage little girl had conceived a sudden, unexplainable devotion to the strange lady whom she had discovered asleep on the sands. Perhaps Bobbin too may have dreamed dreams and imagined quaint fairy tales, so that Polly's appearance answered some fancy of her own. But whatever it was, she had offered her faithful allegiance to this possible fairy princess or just ordinary, human woman. Yet how Bobbin was to keep the faith it was well that neither she nor Polly knew at the present time.

However, by the end of her visit the girl had promised to go back to the home which the town had provided for her and to do her best to learn all she could. As a reward for this she was to be allowed to make other visits to Miss O'Neill. She was even to be allowed to eat from the same blue and white china and drink tea from the same blue cup.

Moreover, before Bobbin's final departure Marie persuaded her into the bathroom and half an hour later she came forth beautifully clean and dressed in a discarded costume of Polly's, which was too long for

her, but otherwise served very well. It was merely a many times washed white silk shirt waist and blue serge walking skirt and coat. They made Bobbin appear rather absurd and old, so that Polly was not sure she had not liked her best in her rags. However, both Bobbin and Marie were too pleased for her to offer criticism; yet, notwithstanding, Polly made up her mind that she would try and purchase the girl more suitable clothes as soon as possible and that she would write and ask Betty Graham's and Sylvia's advice in regard to her.

For Richard Hunt had not come to see her since their accidental meeting and she could hope for no interest from him. Polly wished she had never laid eyes upon him, for their little talk had only served to start a chain of memories she wished forgotten. Besides, of course, she felt lonelier than ever, since there is nothing so depressing as waiting for a friend who does not come.

Soon after dinner that evening Polly undressed and put on a pretty kind of tea gown of dark red silk, the color she

had always fancied ever since girlhood. She was idling about in her sitting room wondering what she could do to amuse herself when unexpectedly Mr. Hunt was announced.

"Why, Polly," he began on entering, his manner changed from the coldness of their first meeting, "do you know what that gown you are wearing brings back to me? Our talk in the funny little boarding house in Boston so many years ago, when you explained to me that you had run off and were in hiding in order to try and learn to be an actress. I wish I could tell you how proud I am of your success."

But Polly did not wish to talk of her success tonight. So she only shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I have always been doing foolish things for the sake of my acting and yet I don't seem to amount to much."

After this visit Richard Hunt returned half a dozen times. Polly did not understand whether he was acting in the West not far from Colorado Springs or whether he too was taking a holiday. She asked

the question once, but as her old friend did not answer her explicitly she let the matter drop.

Nevertheless it was quite true that from the time his visits began she grew steadily better. Finally, about ten days before Christmas, Miss O'Neill's physician announced that she might return to the New Hampshire hills to complete her cure at her sister's home.

Then came the hour of final decision in regard to Bobbin.

Of course Polly could not adopt the girl in the conventional sense. It would have been impossible to have her travel about with her or to have kept her constantly with her. And even if it had been possible this was not what Bobbin needed. Fortunately for Polly, Richard Hunt's ideas on the subject were far more sensible than her own. Between them it was decided that Bobbin should travel east with Miss O'Neill and her maid and spend Christmas at the big Webster farm. Mollie had written she would be glad to have her. Then later Bobbin was to see Sylvia Wharton and be put into some school where

she might learn to talk and perhaps acquire some useful occupation.

There was no difficulty in persuading the town authorities to permit the little girl to follow her new friend. Indeed, the child had always been a tremendous problem and they were more than glad to be rid of the burden. She seemed completely changed by Miss O'Neill's influence. She was far quieter and more tractable and had not run away in several weeks. Besides this she appeared to be learning all kinds of things in the most extraordinary fashion. However, her teacher explained this to Polly by saying that Bobbin had always been unusually clever, but that some wild streak in her nature had kept her from making any real effort until now.

Another peculiarity of the girl's which Polly remembered having seen an example of on the morning of their first meeting was that she had absolutely no sensation of physical fear. Either nothing hurt her very much or else she was indifferent to pain. For this reason it had always been impossible either to punish her or to make her aware of danger. The thought inter-

ested Polly, since she considered herself something of a coward. She wondered if some day she and Bobbin might not change places and the little girl be discovered taking care of her.

However, when the three women finally started east there was nothing unusual in the appearance of any one of them. For by this time Polly's protégé was dressed like any other girl of her age with her hair neatly braided. There only remained her peculiar fashion of staring.

Richard Hunt saw the little party off. He expected to be in New York later in the winter and promised to write and inquire what had become of Bobbin. However, he did not promise to come to Woodford to see Miss O'Neill, although Polly more than once invited him.

CHAPTER XIII

"A Little Rift Within the Lute"

"BUT, my dearest sister, what is the matter with Betty? You were perfectly right, she isn't one bit like herself and neither is Anthony. I don't even believe she was particularly glad to see me when I stopped over in Concord with her for a few days."

Polly O'Neill was in her sister Mollie's big, sunshiny living room in her splendid old farm-house near Sunrise Cabin. There was no specially handsome furniture in the room, perhaps nothing particularly beautiful in itself, yet Polly had just announced that it was the very homiest room in all the world and for that reason the nicest.

There were low book-shelves on two sides the room, for though Mollie never read anything except at night when her husband read aloud to her, Billy Webster kept up with all the latest books, fiction, history, travel, besides subscribing to most

of the magazines in the country. Indeed, although he and Polly often quarreled good-naturedly, Polly was openly proud of her brother-in-law, who had turned out to be a more intelligent and capable man than she had ever expected.

But besides Billy's books there were lots of old chairs, some of them rather worn, but all delightfully comfortable; a great big table, now littered with children's toys; the old-fashioned couch upon which Polly was reposing; some ornaments belonging to ancestral Websters and a tall grandfather's clock, besides half a dozen engravings and etchings on the walls.

Mollie was sitting in a low chair dressing a big china doll. The sunshine lingered on her dark hair, her plump pink cheeks and her happy expression. For she was in a delightful state of content with the world. Was not her beloved Polly at home for the Christmas festivities and were not Billy and the children and her mother in excellent health and spirits?

Yet she looked a little uneasy over her sister's question. For Betty was nearer to

her heart than any one outside her own family.

"So you noticed it too, Polly?" she returned, stopping her work for a moment and gazing out the great glass window. Outside in the snow her three children were playing, her little girl, Polly, and Billy and Dan. Bobbin was standing a short distance away watching them intently. Indeed, ever since her arrival at the farm she seemed to have done almost nothing except look and look with all her might and main. The girl seemed scarcely to wish either to eat or sleep. And at first this had worried her new friends, until suddenly Polly had realized what a wonderful new experience Mollie's home and family were to this child who had never seen anything in the least like it in her whole life.

But Mollie was not watching the children. Polly got up and leaned on her elbow to discover what had attracted her sister's attention. For only a few moments before the children had been sent outdoors to keep them from tiring the aunt whom they adored.

No, Mollie's gaze was fastened on a big man who had just approached wearing a heavy overcoat and a fur cap and carrying a great bunch of mistletoe and holly in his hands, which he was showing with careful attention to the little girl visitor.

"Here comes Billy," she explained. "Perhaps he can tell us."

Of course Polly laughed. "Gracious, dear, isn't there anything in the world you won't let your husband decide? I should think that even Mr. William Webster could hardly tell us what is troubling our beloved Betty. And I don't know that it is even right to ask him. You see, old maids are shy about these things."

But in reply Mollie shook her head reproachfully. "I was only going to ask Billy about the difficulty Anthony is having with his position as Governor," she explained. "You see, I know there is some kind of talk. People are saying he is not being as honest as they expected. There is a bill which ex-Governor Peyton and Meg's husband, Jack Emmet, and her brother, John, are trying to get through the Legislature. Most people don't think

the bill is honest and believe Anthony should come out and say he is opposed to it. But so far he has not said anything one way or the other. I thought maybe Betty was worrying because people were thinking such hateful things about Anthony. I simply couldn't stand it if it were Billy."

"Wise Mollie!" her sister answered thoughtfully. "You may be right, but somehow there seemed to me to be something else troubling Betty. If it were only this political trouble, why shouldn't she have confided in me?"

But at this instant William Webster came into the room with a dozen letters and almost as many newspapers in his hands. Six of the letters he bestowed on Polly, who opened five of them and stuck the sixth inside her dress.

Ten minutes later Billy Webster looked up from the paper he was reading. "See here," he said, "I don't like this. This paper comes pretty near having an insulting letter in it concerning Anthony Graham. Of course it does not say anything outright, but the insinuations are even

worse. See, the article is headed: 'Is Our Reform Governor So Honest As We Supposed?' Then later on the writer suggests that Anthony may not be above taking graft himself. Everybody knows he is a poor man."

Afterwards there was an unusual silence in the big room until Billy turned inquiringly toward his wife and sister-in-law.

"Don't take my question in the wrong way, please," he began rather timidly. "But is Betty Graham a very extravagant woman? I know she was brought up to have a great deal of money, and although she was poor for a little while that may not have made any difference. You see, Anthony Graham is absolutely an honest man, but everybody knows that he adores his wife——"

Billy stopped because quite in her old girlhood fashion Polly had sprung up on her sofa and her eyes were fairly blazing at him.

"What utter nonsense, Billy Webster! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for suggesting such a thing. In the first place, Betty is not extravagant, but even

if she were she would most certainly rather be dead than have Anthony do a dishonest thing on her account. Besides, if Anthony is your friend and you really believe in him, you ought not to doubt him under any possible circumstances." Then Polly bit her lips and calmed down somewhat, for Mollie was looking a little frightened as she always did when her sister and Billy disagreed. However, her sympathies this time were assuredly on her sister's side.

"If you had cnly belonged to a Camp Fire club as we did with Betty Ashton you would never have doubted her even for a second, Billy. I know you don't really," Mollie added, somewhat severely for her. "Oh, dear, I never shall cease to be grateful for our club! All the girls seem almost like sisters to me, and especially Betty."

Billy Webster folded up his paper and glanced first at his wife and then at his sister-in-law.

"I beg everybody's pardon," he said slowly, "and I stand rebuked! Certainly I did not mean really to doubt either

Anthony or Betty for a moment. But you are right, Mollie dear, that Camp Fire Club certainly taught you girls loyalty toward one another. I don't believe people dare say nowadays that women are not loyal friends, and perhaps the Camp Fire clubs have had their influence. But some day soon I believe I will go up to Concord and see Anthony. Perhaps he might like to talk to an old friend."

"He and Betty and the children are coming to Woodford for Christmas," Mollie announced contentedly, whipping away at the lace on the doll's dress now that peace was again restored. "Betty says she can't miss the chance of spending a Christmas with Polly after all these years. Besides, she is curious about Bobbin. I hope Sylvia will come too. She won't promise to leave her old hospital, but I believe the desire to see Polly will bring her here. You know she writes, Polly, that you are positively not to come to her for the present."

Her sister nodded, but a few moments later got up and went up alone to her own room.

Their talk had somehow made her feel

more uncomfortable about Betty than she had in the beginning. Somehow she had hoped that Mollie would not be so ready to agree with her own judgment. Yet most decidedly she had noticed a change in Betty during her short visit to her. Betty was no longer gay and sweet-tempered; she was nervous and cross, sometimes with her husband and children, now and then with the two girls who were spending the winter with her, Angelique Martins and Faith Barton. Moreover, she had gotten a good deal thinner, and though she was as pretty as ever, sometimes looked tired and discontented. Besides, she was living such a society existence, teas, balls, dinners, receptions almost every hour of the day and night. No wonder she was tired! Of course Anthony could not always go with her; he was far too busy and had never cared for society. For a moment Polly wondered when Betty and her husband managed to see each other when they were both so occupied with different interests. Yet when they had married she had believed them absolutely the most devoted and congenial of all her friends.

Well, Betty need not expect finally to escape confessing her difficulty. Even if there was no opportunity for an intimate talk during the Christmas gayeties they must see each other soon again. Either she would go to Concord or have Betty come again to Mollie's.

Then Polly cast off her worries and settling herself comfortably in a big leather chair by the fire took out the letter concealed inside her dress and began reading it.

CHAPTER XIV

Suspicion

"ANGEL, will you go into Anthony's private office; he told me he wanted to speak to you," Betty Graham said carelessly one afternoon in December. She was dressed for driving in a long fur coat and small black velvet hat which brought out the colors in her auburn hair in the most attractive fashion.

However, her expression changed as she saw the girl to whom she had just spoken turn white and clasp the railing of the banister as if to keep herself from falling.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Angel?" she demanded crossly. "You look like you were going to faint when I deliver a perfectly simple message. Surely you are not afraid of Anthony after living here with us all this time and working for him even longer. I suppose he just wants to speak to you about some business in connection with the office. He never talks of

anything else." Then a little ashamed of her impatience, Betty put her arm on Angel's shoulder.

"There has been something on your mind recently, hasn't there, Angel, something you have not cared to confide to me?" She stopped, for her remark was half a statement and half a question.

However, Angel nodded agreement.

"Well, I am sorry, but I don't seem to be worthy of any one's confidence these days," Betty continued, trying to speak lightly. "However, if any one wishes to know where I have gone, dear, please say that Meg Emmet and I are driving together and that we are to have tea with old Professor Everett." And the next moment Betty Graham had disappeared down the steps.

Still Angel stood in the same place and in the same position.

Surely Betty was being kept in the dark if she did not dream of the trouble that had been hovering over the Governor's office for several weeks. Several important state papers had been misplaced, lost or stolen. No one knew what had become of them, yet on them a great deal depended. They

were the proof that the Governor required for exposing certain men whom he believed dishonest. It was absolutely necessary that they should be found.

Summoning her courage, Angel knocked timidly at the Governor's study door. It was in front of this same door that she had watched the guests at the Inaugural Ball some weeks before. Of course it was absurd for her to be frightened at the Governor's having sent for her. She was too insignificant a person even to be questioned in regard to the lost papers, as she was only one of the unimportant stenographers at the Capitol and was only occasionally asked to do any of the Governor's private work.

Anthony was sitting with his desk littered with papers when Angel walked timidly in. She thought he looked rather old and tired and stern for so young a man. But he was always very polite and at once got up and offered her a chair.

"I am sorry to disturb you out of office hours like this, Angel," he began kindly. "I know it is Saturday afternoon and a half holiday, but I thought perhaps we could

talk something over better here at home than at the office. One is so constantly interrupted there."

Angel made a queer little noise in her throat which she believed to have sounded like "Yes."

Of course the Governor was going to dismiss her from her position. She was not a particularly good stenographer, not half so fast as many of the girls, although she had tried to be thorough. But then she had no real talent for office work and of course there was no reason why she should continue to hold her position because she was a friend of the family. Positively Angel was beginning to feel sorry for the Governor's embarrassment and already had made up her mind to try and get some other kind of work. She would not stay on and be dependent.

Anthony was tapping his desk with his pencil.

"See here, Angel," he said, "I wonder if you by any chance have the faintest idea of what has become of some papers we have been a good deal worried about at the office. I know you don't often have any-

thing to do with my private business, but I thought by accident you might have seen them lying around at some time. They were two or three letters bound around with a blue paper and a rubber band. Know anything about them?"

The girl started. For suddenly the Governor's manner had changed and he was looking at her sternly out of his rather cold, searching eyes. For a man does not win his way to greatness through all the trials that Anthony Graham had endured without having some streak of hardness in him.

Quietly Angel shook her head, but she was neither nervous nor offended by the Governor's questioning. She had heard the gossip, strictly within the office, of the loss of these letters and it was most natural that every member of the force should be investigated concerning them.

"I am sorry," she answered, her voice trembling the least little bit in spite of her efforts, "but I have never at any time seen anything of the letters you mention. Could it be possible that one of the servants at the Capitol realized their importance and stole them in order to get money for them?"

"No," the Governor answered promptly, "that is not possible, because the letters were taken from this study and in this house. Think again, Angel, have you seen nothing of them? There is no one else living in the house here, you know, who works at my office except you."

Angel jumped quickly to her feet. "You don't mean—you can't mean," she began chokingly. "Oh, I can't bear it! I shall tell Betty—she will never believe. Why, I thought you were my best friends, almost my only friends." For a moment she found it impossible to go on.

But the Governor was looking almost as wretched as she was herself. "My dear, I don't mean really to accuse you of anything, remember. I am only asking you questions. And I particularly beg of you not to mention this trouble of ours to Betty. She is not very well at present and I am afraid she thinks I am too hard on all her friends. Indeed, I am sure I should never have dreamed of you in connection with this matter, but that some one in whom I have great confidence told me that he had seen you coming out of my study on the

night on which I believe my papers were mislaid. We won't talk about the matter any more for the present, however. Possibly the letters will yet turn up, and it has been only my own carelessness that is responsible for the loss. There, do go up to your own room and lie down for a while, Angel. I assure you this conversation has been as distasteful to me as it has to you. It was only because the discovery of these letters is so important that I decided to talk to you. But don't think I am accusing you."

Sympathetically and apologetically the Governor now smiled at his companion, the smile that had always changed his face so completely from a grave sternness to the utmost kindness and charm.

But Angel would not be appeased. She had always a passionate temper inherited from her Latin ancestors, though she usually kept it well under control.

"You mean your private secretary, Kenneth Helm, has suggested that you question me," she announced bitterly. "I knew he disliked me for some reason or other, but I did not know his dislike was

as cruel as this. It was he who saw me sitting out here watching the people downstairs the night of your Inaugural Ball, because I was too shy to go down alone." For an instant it occurred to Angel to say that she had seen Kenneth Helm enter the Governor's private study on this same evening. But what would have been the use? The Governor probably knew of it and certainly he had the utmost faith in his secretary. It would only look as if she were trying to be spiteful and turn the suspicion upon some one else. Besides, had she not promised Kenneth Helm not to tell? At least she would not condescend to break her word.

Stumbling half blindly, Angel made her way out of the study. In the hall she found Bettina waiting for her.

"You promised to come and play more secret with me. Will you come now, Angel? We can go up to the nursery and lock the door; there is no one to find us," Tina urged.

But Angel could only shake her head, not daring to let the little girl see into her face.

Nevertheless, outside her own bedroom door she had to meet an even greater strain upon her nerves. For there stood Faith Barton in a pretty house dress and with a box of candy in her hands.

"May I come in and talk to you for a little while, Angel?" she asked, hesitating the least little bit. "Kenneth has just sent me a note and a box of candy, saying that he cannot keep his engagement with me tonight. He is so dreadfully busy, poor fellow! I don't believe Governor Graham works one-half so hard. So I thought maybe you would let me stay with you, as I am rather lonely. Besides, Angel, there isn't any sense in your treating me so coldly as you have lately. If I am doing wrong in keeping my engagement a secret, I am doing wrong, that's all. But I don't think you ought to be unkind to me. If I have been hateful to you about anything, truly I am sorry. You know I have always been awfully fond of you, dear, and wanted to be your friend ever so much more than you ever wished to be mine."

But instead of answering Faith, the other

girl had to push by her almost rudely, stammering:

"I can't talk to you now, Faith. I've got the headache. I'm not very well; I must lie down."

Then with Faith standing almost on her threshold, resolutely Angel closed the door in her face.

If there was one person above all others at this moment with whom she could not bear to talk it was Faith Barton.

CHAPTER XV

Waiting to Find Out

As the days passed on, the little French girl did not find her difficulties grow less. At the office she continued to hear veiled discussions of the seriousness of the lost letters. No one, of course, except a few persons in the Governor's confidence, knew exactly what information the letters contained, but there was no question of their political importance, for everybody could feel the atmosphere of strain and suspense. Yet for one thing at least Angelique Martins was grateful: no one had in any way associated her with the lost or stolen papers. For whatever Kenneth Helm suspected, or Governor Graham feared, they had both kept their own counsel. Yet this did not mean that they both considered her guiltless.

Time and time again Angel tried to summon courage to speak directly to Ken-

neth Helm on the subject. She had frequent opportunities, for even if there was danger of notice or interruption at the office, he came very often to the Governor's mansion to see Faith or to dine with the family.

However, she simply did not know what to do or say. To go to Kenneth and ask him why he had accused her seemed to the girl almost like a confession of wrongdoing. For oftentimes it appears preposterous in this world to be forced into denying an act that one could never have even dreamed of committing. How can one suddenly say, "I am *not* a thief, I am *not* a liar," when every thought and act of their lives has been pure and good?

Neither could Angel persuade herself to tell Kenneth Helm that she felt just as suspicious of him as he could possibly feel of her. For she had no proof of any kind except her own dislike and distrust and the fact that she had seen him coming out of the Governor's private study on the same night on which he had suggested that she might have previously entered it. For of course the Governor's private secre-

tary had a right to his chief's private papers at almost all times. No, Kenneth would only consider her accusation an expression of feeble revenge and be perhaps more convinced of her guilt in consequence.

Therefore there was nothing to do but wait with the hope that everything would soon be cleared up and the lost letters either found or their thief discovered.

Moreover, Angel was not even to have the satisfaction of talking the matter over with Betty, the one person in the world who could and would have helped her. For she had the Governor's strict command against this and did not dare disobey. Besides, Angel could see that Betty was unlike herself these days and so should not be troubled by any one else's trials. This, of course, was a mistaken point of view, as nothing would so have helped Betty Graham at this time as to have had some one to think about who really needed her. However, neither her friend nor her husband could have realized this.

Nevertheless there was one consolation that the little French girl enjoyed during

these days and that was "the secret" which she and Bettina had been cherishing so ardently for weeks. Every spare hour she had from her work she and Bettina had spent together in a big room at the top of the house, which was Bettina's own private play-room, sacred to her uses only.

It was a lovely room with pale gray walls and warm, rose-colored curtains, and all about were pictures of girls and boys who had come straight out of fairyland and had their photographs taken by such wonderful fairy artists as Maxfield Parish and Elizabeth Shippen Greene.

For you see Angelique was absolutely attempting to draw one of these fairy pictures herself, while Bettina was acting as her model.

The picture was not to be a portrait, the artist had scarcely courage to have undertaken that, but it was to represent Bettina's favorite heroine, "Snow White and Rose Red."

All her life, ever since she was a little girl of five or six, Angelique Martins had been drawing and painting whenever she

had the least chance or excuse. Of course it was this same artistic gift that had showed in her clever fingers and sense of color through all the work which she had done in the Camp Fire Club. But of her actual talent as an artist Angelique had always been extremely shy. You see, she cared for art so much that she did not consider that she had any *real* talent. But even confessing that she had the least little ability, of course it would take years of study and goodness knows how much money before she could have hoped to amount to anything.

Nevertheless there was nothing to forbid the little lame French girl's amusing herself with her fancy whenever she had the chance. And ever since she could remember, Angel had been drawing pictures for Bettina. It had been their favorite amusement as soon as Tina passed beyond her babyhood, which was sooner than most children.

Naturally Angel had drawn hundreds of pictures with Bettina as her model before, but never one half so ambitious as this. However, this last one represented about

the sixth effort, and it was a great question even now whether this was to be the final one. For "Snow White and Rose Red" was not merely a play picture, one that had been painted merely for amusement; it had a most serious intention behind it.

Weeks before in a magazine which the two friends had been looking over together they had come across an advertisement. A prize of two hundred dollars was offered for the best picture illustrating any fairy story. Moreover, no well-known artist was to be allowed to enter the competition; the drawings were all to be made by amateurs under twenty-five years of age.

The first suggestion that Angel should take part in this wonderful contest had come, of course, from Bettina as soon as the older girl had read her the amazing announcement, for Tina's faith in her friend was without limit. Then just as naturally Angel first laughed at her suggestion and afterwards decided to try just for fun to see what she could do; and here at last was most furiously in earnest, although still undecided whether to send

her picture to the competition or to throw it away.

There were only a few days more before the time limit expired. Therefore, would it be possible for her to undertake an entirely new picture here at the very last?

With these uncertainties weighing on her mind Angel was sitting in front of a small easel with a box of pastels on a table near by. Closer to the big nursery window Bettina was curled up in a white armchair, one foot tucked up under her in a favorite attitude and in her lap were half a dozen red roses.

She was tired, for she had been quiet an unusually long time while Angel made slight changes in her work and then stopped to consider the whole thing disparagingly. But somehow her weariness made Bettina's pose even more charming.

Her long yellow-brown hair hung over her shoulders down into her very lap, her eyes were wide open and yet were plainly not looking at any particular object. For Tina was making up stories to amuse herself while Angel worked. It was only in this way that she could manage to

Angel Had Caught Bettina's Attitude Almost Exactly

keep still for so long a time as Angel needed.

But this was the picture that Bettina herself made; what of her friend's drawing of her? Naturally it was not so graceful or pretty as the little girl herself.

Nevertheless, by some happy chance Angel had caught Bettina's attitude almost exactly. Then too she had drawn a little girl who did not look exactly like other children. There was a suggestion of poetry, almost of mystery, about her fairy tale girl, in the wide open blue-gray eyes, dreaming as Tina's so often were, and in the half uncurled lips.

Of course the lines of the drawing were not so firm and clear as an experienced artist would have made them, yet glancing at the little picture, you felt something that made you wish to look at it again.

However, Angel sighed so that Bettina came out of her dream story and stretched herself in the big chair.

"What is the matter?" she inquired. "May I get up and walk about the room now?"

The older girl nodded. "Thank you, dear. This is the last time I am going to trouble you to sit for this picture. I have just decided that I can't do any better by trying it over again, yet I don't know whether I shall send it to the competition after all."

The next moment Angel was startled by something that sounded almost like a sob from Tina. Since the little girl was so seldom cross, she was surprised and a little frightened.

"I am sorry you are so tired. Why didn't you tell me?" Angelique demanded.

Bettina had crossed the nursery and was standing close beside her picture.

"It isn't that, it is only that I do want you to send it so much," Bettina answered. "You see, I think it is the best picture anybody ever painted and we have both worked so hard and it has been such a nice secret," she said huskily.

Angel put her arm about her. "Of course I'll send it, dear, if you feel that way," she conceded. "But you must not even dream that I shall get the prize and you must promise not to be disap-

pointed if we never hear of the picture again."

Bettina agreed and then there followed a most unexpected knocking at the locked nursery door. The two conspirators stared at each other in consternation.

"Who is it, please?" Bettina demanded. "You know Angel and I are having our secret together and we can't let any one come in."

Betty's voice replied: "Yes, I know; but I thought maybe the secret was over and you would like me to come and play too. I am feeling pretty lonesome."

"Oh," Tina returned, and then she and Angel whispered together. Finally the little girl came over toward the closed door.

"I wish you would not be lonesome just now, mother," she murmured, "just when we are most dreadfully busy. If you will only go away for a little while and then come back, why, Angel and I will love to play with you."

"I am afraid I won't be here after a while," Betty answered and then walked slowly away. It was absurd for her to

feel wounded by such a trifle, and yet recently it had looked as though Bettina preferred Angelique's company to hers. What a useless person she was growing to be! Well, at least she and Meg were going to a Suffrage meeting that afternoon! She had not intended going, but the baby was asleep and Anthony would not be home for hours. Perhaps after the talk ended she might drive by and get Anthony to return with her. She had not thought him looking very well that morning.

CHAPTER XVI

A Talk That Was Not an Explanation

THE Suffrage meeting was fairly interesting, but then both Meg and Betty had been believers in equal rights for men and women ever since their Camp Fire days and there were few new arguments to be heard on the subject.

When they came out from the crowded hall, however, it was still too early to call for Anthony. There could be no hope of getting hold of him before half-past five o'clock. So it was Meg Emmet's suggestion that she and Betty stop by and see her father for a few moments. Professor Everett had a slight cold and his daughter was a little uneasy about him.

They found the old gentleman in his library sipping hot tea and re-reading a letter from his son, Horace, whom Betty could not ever think of by any more serious name than "Bumps." She always saw a vision of the small boy dragging around at

his sister Meg's heels and tumbling over every object in their way. However, "Bumps" had grown up to be a very clever fellow and had a better record at college than his brother John ever had. The young man was to graduate in law at Cornell in the coming spring. The present letter was to say, however, that he expected to spend Christmas in Concord with his father. He had been doing some tutoring at Cornell and had earned the money for his trip himself.

Plainly Professor Everett was much pleased by this news. He had always been a devoted father to all his three motherless children, but Horace was his "Benjamin."

Moreover, they were still talking of "Bumps" when unexpectedly John Everett made his appearance. He was looking rather fagged, but explained that there was nothing going on at his office and so he had quit for the day.

Nevertheless tea had a reviving effect upon him, as it had upon both Meg and Betty, so that Betty was surprised to discover that it was twenty minutes past five o'clock when her visit seemed scarcely to have begun.

It was quite dark, however, as it was toward the middle of December when the days are short, so that John Everett insisted upon accompanying his sister and friend, even though they were in Betty's carriage.

Meg's home was nearer. They drove there first and later John went on to the Capitol, where Betty sent in to inquire if the Governor were free to return home with her.

There was a little time to wait before the answer came, so that in the meanwhile Betty and John continued talking.

It was Betty who asked the first important question.

"I do hope, John, that your new business is succeeding," she said carelessly, although of course she felt a friendly interest in John's success and in that of Meg's husband.

However, John Everett hesitated a moment before replying.

"Oh, our success depends on your Governor and so perhaps on you," he answered in a half joking tone. "I don't know whether you happen to have heard anything about it, but we are trying to get a

bill through the Legislature this season which will give us the chance to build the new roads in the state of New Hampshire for the next few years. But we don't know just yet how the Governor feels about it, whether he is going to oppose our bill or work with us. He has a big lot of influence."

"Oh," Betty replied vaguely. She sincerely hoped that John Everett was not going to try persuade her to ask her husband to assist him for the second time. Surely if he did she would refuse. For in the first place she did not wish to confess that she believed herself to have no real influence with her husband and in the second she wouldn't try to interfere in anything so important as a bill to be gotten through the Legislature unless she knew everything about it. Formerly she had taken an intense interest in all the political affairs that interested her husband, yet recently Anthony had not been discussing matters with her very often. Moreover, she had a sudden feeling that she did not wish to be mixed up again with John Everett's concerns.

So fortunately before Betty had a chance to reply Anthony came down the length of stone steps to his wife's carriage.

He seemed pleased at seeing her, but not very enthusiastic over her companion.

However, John Everett said good-bye and left at once.

They had only fairly started on the road toward home when Anthony said suddenly:

"I do wish, Betty, that you would not be seen so often with John Everett. Oh, I know you don't realize it, but it seems to me that you are very often with him. I know he is Meg's brother and that you are devoted friends, but I tell you I don't like the fellow. The more I know him, the less I like him. So I simply won't have my wife in his society."

Betty caught her breath and her cheeks flushed hotly in the darkness. How unkind Anthony was to her these days! Could it be possible that he did not love her any more? He certainly could not be jealous of John Everett; that idea was too absurd to be considered. For she never had cared for any one in her life except her husband and

he must know it. However, she had no intention of being bullied.

"Don't be silly, Anthony," Betty replied petulantly. "I don't see very much of John Everett. Besides, if I did what difference would it make? Of course, if you know anything actually against him you would tell me?"

"So you no longer wish to do things just because I wish them? I'm sorry, Betty," Anthony returned. Then they drove the rest of the way home in silence, both behaving like sullen children in spite of the fact that they were entirely grown-up people, the Governor of the state and his clever and charming wife.

For the truth was that Anthony Graham was jealous of John Everett and yet was ashamed to speak of it. He would never have dreamt of such a feeling if only he and Betty had not been estranged for the past few weeks. Besides, he was missing the opportunity to spend as much time with her as he formerly had before his election to office. Surely Betty must understand that. How could he help hating to have another fellow drinking tea with

her on any number of afternoons when he was slaving at his office—especially a man like John Everett?

Oh, of course Anthony realized that this was rather a dog-in-the-manger attitude on his part and that he ought to laugh over it with his wife.

Moreover, if he had, Betty would have understood and forgiven him. She might even have been a little pleased, since she believed that Anthony did not miss the loss of her society half so much as she had the loss of his. If he had even told her the special reason he had for disliking John Everett doubtless she would have been convinced, in spite of her natural loyalty to her old friends.

But Anthony did not even do this. He had an idea that he was saving Betty trouble by not telling her of the loss of the papers by which he could prove that the bill which ex-Governor Peyton, Jack Emmet and John Everett were trying to get through the Legislature was an effort to cheat the state.

Yet in consequence Betty cried herself into a headache and was therefore unable

to come down to dinner, while Anthony decided that she would not come simply because she was too angry with him.

So can people in this world manage to misunderstand each other, even after they have been married a number of years and are very deeply and truly in love with each other.

CHAPTER XVII

Christmas

STILL unreconciled, Anthony and Betty went together to spend their Christmas with Mrs. Ashton in Woodford in the old Ashton homestead. They took with them both Bettina and Tony and the nurse and Faith Barton. However, Faith was of course to stay with her foster parents, Doctor and Mrs. Barton.

Only Angel refused to accompany the little party. She claimed not to be feeling well, to have some business that she must attend to, and indeed made so many excuses that Betty, seeing that she really did wish to be left behind, gave up arguing the matter with her. Moreover, Meg promised to look after Angel and see that she had her Christmas dinner with them, so that she would not be particularly lonely.

It was in Angel's mind that perhaps during the family's absence something might occur which would relieve her from all sus-

picion in the Governor's sight. Yet if she thought that this would come about through Kenneth Helm she was mistaken, for Kenneth departed for Woodford on Christmas eve to spend the following day with Faith and her parents.

Besides seeing her mother and giving her children the pleasure of a country Christmas Betty was chiefly looking forward to being with Polly. Somehow she felt that Polly would be sure to cheer her up and make her feel young again. They could take long walks through the woods and discover whether little Sunrise Cabin was still habitable. Billy and Mollie had always looked after it, carefully attending to whatever repairs were necessary, so doubtless it was as good as new.

Nevertheless it was extremely difficult after her arrival for Betty and Polly to find time for the intimate hours that they both longed to have together, for there were so many other people about—old friends and relatives

Nan Graham came from Syracuse, where she had charge of the department of domestic science in the High School, in order to be

with her brother Anthony, whom she had not seen since his election.

Edith Norton with her husband and four children still lived in Woodford and claimed the intimacy of their Camp Fire days. Then, of course, there was Herr Krippen and Mrs. Krippen and Betty's small stepbrother to be considered, besides Mr. and Mrs. Wharton, Eleanor and Frank.

But perhaps the most important and unexpected member of the Christmas gathering was the distinguished and eccentric Doctor Sylvia Wharton. Certainly it was Sylvia who kept Betty and Polly from being alone with each other during her own brief visit.

The morning of the day before Christmas Mollie got a letter from Sylvia, who had charge of a hospital in Philadelphia, saying that much as she regretted it she would be unable to spend Christmas with them.

During the late afternoon Polly, who had escaped from the noise and confusion going on inside Mollie's big house, was taking a walk up and down the bare wind-swept orchard to the left of the house. The ground

was covered with hard white snow and the air stung with a kind of delicious cold freshness.

It was a part of Polly's regular duty to stay out of doors for a certain number of hours each day, so she now stopped her walk for a moment and glanced ahead at some almost blue-black pine trees silhouetted against the twilight sky.

Suddenly she became conscious of what sounded like a masculine step behind her, and before she could turn around felt her two arms firmly grasped by a pair of capable hands and herself swung slowly about.

She faced a figure not so tall as her own, but broader, stronger and far more sturdy. The blue eyes looked at her through a pair of spectacles, the flaxen hair was parted in the middle and without the least sign of a crinkle drawn straight back on either side. The mouth was firm, but curiously kind. And just now it actually showed signs of trembling.

"Why, Sylvia Wharton!" Polly said and straightway hid her face in the fur of her stepsister's long coat. Immediately she had a feeling of dependence on Sylvia's

judgment and affection just as she had for so long a time, although she was several years the older.

"Don't try to hide your face from me, Polly O'Neill. I want to see how you are looking before you get back into the house and do your best to deceive me. I can feel already that you are thin as a rail," Dr. Sylvia murmured severely. "You see if I don't straighten you out before you go back to that wretched work again!"

"It was good of you to come, Sylvia; I was so disappointed over your letter this morning. Only I am not your patient, dear; I am quite all right. It is 'Bobbin,' my poor little girl, I want you to look after and find somebody to help," Polly returned with unaccustomed meekness. "Really she is interesting and unusual. Both Mollie and Billy Webster think so; it isn't only my foolishness. I suppose you thought my bringing her east with me was rather mad, didn't you, Sylvia?"

Sylvia smiled the slow smile that had always beautified her plain face. "No, not mad, only Polly!" she answered dryly. "But of course I'll look the little girl over

for you, and then I'll find the best person to see her and you can send her to me in Philadelphia. Only don't think you are going to escape by that method yourself."

On Christmas Eve all the grown-up members of the Christmas party dined with Mrs. Ashton and Betty in the town of Woodford, since Mollie was to have the tree and Christmas dinner for them and the children on the farm the next day.

It was an amusing change from the past to find that Anthony Graham and Sylvia Wharton were really the lions of the evening. How different it had been in the old days when Anthony was only an awkward, shabby, obscure boy and Sylvia the plainest and most unprepossessing of the Sunrise Hill Camp Fire girls!

Polly and Betty too, in spite of her wounded feelings, were both immensely pleased and amused by it.

Of course Sylvia would rather have died than have mentioned the fact, but quite by accident Anthony had read the previous day of Sylvia's election as President of the American Medical Society, the highest honor that had ever been paid a woman in

the medical profession in the United States.

Hearing the story at the dinner table, Sylvia was of course confused by the admiration and applause it excited, for she was still as shy and reserved about her own accomplishments as she had ever been as a young girl.

Moreover, it was Polly who recalled having once predicted that Sylvia Wharton would become the most distinguished of the Camp Fire girls and who made a little speech in her honor, much to the confusion and disgust of Sylvia.

Then Billy Webster offered their congratulations to Anthony, who was almost equally modest about his own attainments and insisted that his election as Governor was due to a happy accident and not to any possible ability of his own.

The Christmas day following was even more crowded with people and excitement. Actually Mollie and Billy were to have thirty guests to dine at the farm at two o'clock and the Christmas tree for the children was to be given immediately after.

Notwithstanding, Sylvia arranged to spend an hour alone with Polly and Bobbin

in a room at the top of the house where there could be no interruption.

She appeared to be deeply interested in Bobbin. She made Polly talk and then saw how easily Bobbin seemed to be able to understand. Then she asked questions herself which now and then the little girl was able to comprehend.

Polly explained that perchance Bobbin understood her better than other people, because of her training as an actress, which of course required her to enunciate more distinctly. However, Dr. Wharton made no reply and after a time Bobbin was sent away to watch the children at play.

Then Polly sat quietly in a big armchair, while Sylvia strode up and down the room with her hands clasped behind her. They were both silent for quite five minutes.

Afterwards Sylvia spoke first.

"I am by no means sure your little girl is entirely deaf, Polly," she remarked abruptly. "But I am not an expert in the matter and I don't want to trust my own judgment. I believe she hears indistinctly perhaps and so has never learned to talk. Yet it would not surprise me if a sudden

shock of some kind might make her hear, and after that she would learn to talk easily enough. But I'll discuss her case and we can see about it later. Now you are to let me look you over."

Of course Polly shrugged her shoulders and objected, insisting that she was entirely well and that it was absurd to waste Sylvia's time.

Nevertheless, as usual, Dr. Wharton had her way and at the end of a half hour's examination Polly appeared pale and exhausted, while Sylvia looked more satisfied.

"You are not to go back on the stage again this winter, Miss O'Neill," she announced decisively. "But you really are in better health than I expected to find you. If you only would behave with a little more sense!"

Polly sighed, waving her accuser away.

"Do go and let me rest now, please," she commanded. "You know I have promised to recite for the children for an hour or so after dinner. And I do wish my friends and family would stop asking me to behave with better sense. How can I if I haven't got it? Everybody ought to be sorry for me.

Smiling, Sylvia departed. It was like old times to hear Polly talking in her old aggrieved fashion when she knew herself to be really in the wrong. But then Sylvia decided that she would probably always love Polly more than any one else in the world, even if they saw each other so seldom. For she never expected to marry herself and doubted now whether Polly ever would. There had been a scare years before about a Richard Hunt, but as Polly never mentioned his name now she must by this time have forgotten him.

The Christmas dinner and tree were a great success. After Polly had made the children shriek with pleasure by playing a dozen characters from Mother Goose, and the older people cry by reciting several exquisite Christmas poems by Whitcomb Riley and Eugene Field, the guests then sang Camp Fire songs until darkness descended.

It was a pity, however, that Esther and Dick and their children were in Boston and unable to come home for the holidays, for Esther's beautiful voice was sadly needed in the music.

But at six o'clock Sylvia was forced to leave for Philadelphia, and so the other guests decided that it was time that the weary children should be taken home.

However, for one minute Polly and Betty did manage to slip over into a corner and in that moment made an engagement to spend the whole of the next afternoon together. Moreover, in order to get away from every one else they planned to take a long walk to Sunrise Cabin.

Nevertheless that same night each of the two friends lay awake for several hours, firmly resolving not to tell the other the trouble that lay nearest their hearts. For they both decided that they should have gotten beyond their old girlhood confidences and that there were certain things women should keep to themselves.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Stupidity of Men

"BUT, my dear, there isn't the least use of your denying it. The fact that you are unhappy is as plain as the nose on your face. Of course if you don't want to tell me the reason you need not, but don't expect me to be so stupid as not to see it," Polly concluded solemnly.

Actually the two friends were in the time-honored old living room in Sunrise Cabin. With their own hands they had brought in twigs and logs from outdoors and lighted an enormous fire in the big fireplace. Then Polly had produced three candles from her handbag and had stuck them into the tarnished brass candlesticks that were still ornamenting the mantel, where they were now burning fitfully.

With their coats off both of the old Camp Fire girls sat on rickety chairs before the fire, their chins resting in their hands and gazing none too happily into the flames.

"But I tell you, you are mistaken, Polly. There is nothing the matter with me. Of course one can't expect to be happy when one grows older, as in our old irresponsible Camp Fire days. Maybe it is old age that is troubling me, for I am a most uninterestingly healthy person."

In replying Betty tried to make her tones as light as possible; nevertheless her companion only frowned the more unbelievingly.

"Our Camp Fire days were never irresponsible ones for me, Betty child," Polly responded, gazing thoughtfully around the dear, dismantled room. "Often I feel I never learned so much at any other time in my life as I did then. But the fact remains that you are not happy as I want you to be, and I wish with all my heart that you loved me enough to tell me the reason why. You see, Betty, I am rather a lonely, good-for-nothing old maid and I can't expect much for myself. But you have absolutely everything in the world any woman could wish. And I think it is positively wicked of you not to be the same gay, sweet Betty."

At this Polly got out a small handkerchief

and began dabbing her Irish blue eyes, that were shedding tears partly from the smoke of the fire and partly from a general sense of discouragement.

In return Betty stared back at her with equal severity. "What a perfectly absurd fashion for you to talk, Polly O'Neill!" she replied. "You know perfectly well that if you had chosen to marry you might have had what I have. Only you didn't want to marry; you wanted a career and to be famous and to make money instead. Well, haven't you succeeded? Is that what you are crying about?"

Polly nodded. "I expect there isn't any law about wanting everything, is there, Betty Ashton Graham? So long as women are women, no matter what they may try to do or be, there will be times when they cry for nice husbands and babies. But I wasn't crying about me, it was about you," she continued ungrammatically and with her usual logic. "Here you are growing more beautiful every day you live. Everybody loves you; you have hundreds of friends, the two most fascinating children in the world, except Mollie's, and a husband

who is about the best and cleverest man in the state, and who simply adores you, and yet you are wretched and cross and unlike yourself. I watched you yesterday, Betty, and you never smiled a single time when you thought no one was looking and you never once spoke to Anthony. The poor fellow appeared dreadfully troubled too. Whatever is the matter, I am much sorrier for him than I am for you," Polly concluded somewhat vindictively.

"Oh!" Betty faltered and then was so silent that Polly humped her stool nearer until her shoulder touched that of her friend.

"That last remark wasn't true, of course, Betty," Polly apologized. "For if Anthony is really a snake in the grass and treats you badly when he looks so noble and kind, why, I shall simply come to Concord and tell him what I think of him right in the Governor's mansion. I don't care whether he puts me into the state prison or not."

Then, although she had been tremblingly near tears herself the moment before, Betty was compelled to laugh. Whoever could do anything else in Polly O'Neill's society? The thought of Anthony's thrust-

ing a very noisy and protesting Polly into prison was a picture to dispel almost any degree of gloom.

Betty slipped her arm across her friend's shoulder. "No, dear, you must not think Anthony is unkind to me; it isn't that," she responded slowly. "Only I don't believe he exactly 'adores' me as much as he used to. Sometimes men get tired of their wives."

"Nonsense, goose! What put that notion in your head?" Polly returned lightly, although she was a little frightened by her friend's reply.

Really she had not believed that anything could have come between Anthony and Betty. Her suggestion had only been made in order to induce Betty to deny it. The next moment she leaned over and put several fresh logs on the fire.

"Nothing and no one in this world could ever persuade me, Betty dearest, that Anthony does not adore you," Polly then continued with convincing earnestness. "You see, he began when you were sixteen years old and he never knew that any other girl lived in the world. He does not know

it now, for he never even glanced at a single one of us yesterday, if he could help it. But you see Princess, dear, you are a good deal spoiled. You always have been ever since you were a baby, by your family and all your friends. Even the Camp Fire Club used to look up to you and be more devoted to you than any one else. Esther has always been your slave and now your little French girl seems to feel about you just as Esther used to do. Really, Betty, I expect you need discipline."

Yet even as she spoke Betty's auburn hair glistened with such exquisite colors in the firelight that Polly stroked it softly with her slender fingers.

The Governor's wife was thinking too deeply to notice her.

"I wonder if things are my fault, Polly. I almost hope they are," she answered wistfully. "You see, it has seemed to me lately that Anthony has been dreadfully unreasonable. He won't do the things I ask him to and though he is too busy to be with me himself, he isn't willing for me to spend much time even with my oldest friends."

"Oh, ho!" whistled Polly softly. "What friends, for instance, Princess?"

"Oh, Meg Emmet and—John Everett. Isn't it absurd? But Anthony has always felt a prejudice against John ever since we were boys and girls together here in Woodford," Betty explained. "I don't care particularly for John now myself. He has grown kind of stupid and thinks too much about what he eats, but it would look utterly ridiculous of me to cut him for no reason except that Anthony is absurd."

Polly dug her chin deeper into the palm of her hand as she so often did in moments of abstraction.

"Seems like a little enough thing to do if Anthony wishes it and you could do it very gracefully you know, Princess dear," Polly replied. "Besides, I am not so sure Anthony has no reason for his prejudice. I never liked John Everett a cent myself when we were all young. He was always trying to lord it over the rest of us and pretend to be very rich and grand and superior. Besides, Betty Graham, I don't believe I should care to have a husband who would do every solitary thing I asked him to do.

Somehow, I think I would like him to have a little judgment of his own now and then. So you really wish Anthony to do exactly as he is told. I wonder if your children are as obedient? But come along, dear, it is getting so late Mollie will be having fits about us. Fortunately you are a more sensible woman than I am. A perfectly obedient husband is about the last thing in this world I require. To what dreadful end would I bring him!"

But Betty did not stir from her stool even when her companion had crossed over the room and now stood holding out her long fur coat, waiting for her to put her arms inside it.

"Dear, if there is one thing I am more sure of at this moment than of anything else, it is that I am not *so* sensible a woman as Polly O'Neill. Though goodness knows I never could have believed it!" Betty whispered, laughing and yet profoundly in earnest. "It was a most excellent sermon and I mean to do my best to profit by it. Truly I have been behaving like a spoiled child for weeks. I know Anthony has a great many things

that trouble him and I ought to have been more considerate. Somehow I expect this marriage is really more the girl's business than the man's. He has to make the living for the family in most cases and the Camp Fire taught us that home making was a girl's highest privilege."

Then Betty got up and slipped on her beautiful long coat and the two friends started back toward Mollie's big farm together.

In all their girlhood they had never felt more intimate or more devoted. Yet neither one of them talked much during the long walk, just an occasional question now and then.

The sun was going down, but there was an after-glow in the sky and because of the whiteness of the snow there was still sufficient light. At least Polly and Betty could see each other's faces with perfect distinctness.

They had nearly reached the farmhouse when Betty suddenly stopped and put both hands on Polly's shoulders.

"Look me directly in the eyes, Polly," she commanded.

And Polly attempted doing as she was bid, but her lashes drooped until they touched her cheeks.

"Have you fallen in love with some one recently, Polly? Is that why you talked about yourself in such a discouraged fashion just now and lectured me so severely?" Betty inquired.

Polly shook her head. "I don't know whether you would call it falling in love recently, Betty, or whether I have been in love for the last ten years. But I saw Richard Hunt again when I was in Colorado and he was even nicer than he used to be. He don't care a single thing about me any more, Betty. He hasn't even sent me a Christmas card! The letter I had from him a few days ago was all about Bobbin. He wasn't even interested enough to inquire if I was well."

CHAPTER XIX

A Cry in the Night

BECAUSE she was tired from her long walk and her conversation and from other reasons Polly went upstairs to bed sooner than her sister and brother-in-law.

As a special privilege the children had begged that Bobbin should be allowed to sleep in the nursery with them, and rather against her will Polly had consented. The little girl had previously occupied a small room connected with her own.

However, she was too weary for argument, and besides Mollie's babies were cross and unreasonable. They had been playing all afternoon with the Christmas tree which stood in the big back parlor just under Polly's room. Anything to get them safely stowed in bed and the house quiet!

For Polly had expected to lie awake for a number of hours, reflecting on many

things, when in point of fact immediately after retiring she sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Moreover, about ten o'clock Mollie and Billy also decided to follow their sister's example. And it was Billy himself who closed up the windows and made the house ready for the night. Only he failed to go into the back parlor where the Christmas tree stood and where the floor was now littered with discarded toys and games and the walls hung with dried-out evergreens.

He was under the impression that the windows in this room had been closed and locked when the children departed to bed. Moreover, locking up at the farmhouse was more of a custom than a necessity. No one had any real fear of burglars or tramps. Besides, the windows in the back parlor were locked and no danger was to come from the outside.

But it must have been only about three hours later when Mollie suddenly awoke with a scream and start. A hand had passed lightly over her face.

The next instant and Billy jumped up and seized hold of the intruder.

Yet his hands clasped only a slight, childish form in a white gown. It was too dark in the room to see who it could be until Mollie lit the candle which stood always by their bedside.

Then they both discovered Bobbin, not walking in her sleep as they supposed, but with her face very white and making queer little movements with her hands and lips.

"The child is frightened; something must have to disturbed her," Billy suggested, still only half awake himself.

But Mollie had jumped out of bed and was already on her way to the nursery. Naturally she presumed that something had happened to one of the children and that Bobbin had come to call her. Poor little girl, she had no other way of calling than to touch with her hands!

However, half way down the hall Mollie turned and ran back into her own bedroom.

"Get up please, Billy, in a hurry, won't you? I do believe I smell smoke somewhere in the house. Something must be on fire. Of course Bobbin could detect it before the rest of us; she is sure to have a keener sense of smell."

A moment later and Billy had jumped almost all the way down the long flight of old-fashioned country stairs.

"Don't be frightened, dear, but get the children up and put clothes on them," he shouted back. "It is too cold for you to go out in the snow undressed and we are miles from a neighbor. I will call the men and we will fight the fire. Don't forget to waken Polly!"

With this last injunction in her mind Mollie stopped to hammer on her sister's door before she ran on to the nursery.

She was certain that she heard Polly answer her. Besides, by this time the house was filled with an excited tumult, Mollie's little boys were dancing about in the hall, half pleased and half frightened with the excitement, their nurse was scolding and crying and vainly endeavoring to dress the small Polly.

So it was plain enough that for the next few minutes Mollie had difficulty enough in keeping her wits about her and in quieting her family, especially as every now and then she could hear her husband's voice from below calling on her to hurry as quickly as possible.

Only Bobbin at once slipped into a heavy, long coat and shoes and rushed back to Polly's room. The door was locked, but she pounded patiently and automatically on the outside, unable, of course, to hear the answering voice from within.

Then there came a sudden hoarse shout from below stairs and in that instant Mr. Webster, dashing up a flight of steps almost at one bound, returned with the baby in his arms, while Mollie led one of the small boys and the nurse the other.

"Come on, you and Polly, at once!" Mollie cried, waving her hands and pointing toward the great hall to show that there was no time for further delay.

But this was evident enough to Bobbin without being told, for the smoke was pouring out of the parlor into the hall and coming up the stairs like a great advancing army.

However, Bobbin would not leave her post. There was not the faintest thought in her brain of ever stirring from without that locked door until the one person whom she loved in the world should come forth

from it. And she was not conscious of feeling particularly afraid, only she could not understand why Miss O'Neill would not hurry.

A moment later, however, and Bobbin found herself outside standing alone in the snow.

There had been no possible outcry on her part, no explanation and no argument, of course. Only when one of the farm laborers rushing up-stairs had seen the little girl loitering in the hall, without saying by your leave, he had seized her in his arms and borne her struggling through the now stifling smoke.

Outside in the yard Bobbin for a moment felt weak and confused. For all at once the place seemed to be swarming with excited people.

There were a dozen men and their families living on the big farm with houses of their own. And now the ringing of a great bell had brought them all out with their wives and children as well.

The women were swarming about Mollie with their children, crying, gesticulating, talking. It was a clear, white night and

Bobbin could see them easily. The men were engaged in rushing back and forth with pails of water, fearing that the water might freeze on the way.

But there was nowhere any sign of Polly!

Bobbin did not try to attract attention. In the instant it did not even occur to her that she might not have been able to make any one understand. Simply and without being seen she slipped into one of the big front windows, opened by the men as a passage-way, and started fighting her way again up the black, smoke-laden steps.

There seemed to be no more air, it was all a thick, foggy substance that got into your throat and made you unable to breathe and into your eyes so that you could not see. But Bobbin went resolutely on.

She clung to the banisters and dragged herself upward, either too stupid or too intent on her errand to suffer fear. Nevertheless, through the smoke she could see that long tongues of flame were bursting out of the doors of the back parlor into the hall beneath her.

Only, once more at Polly's bedroom door Bobbin lost heart and the only real terror she ever remembered enduring seized hold on her. For Polly's door was still locked and she had no means of making her hear.

All that she could accomplish by hammering and kicking she had done before. Of course, she tried this again, yet the door did not open and so far as Bobbin could know there was no movement from the inside.

Yet next Miss O'Neill's room there was her own room and the door of this was unfastened. With a kind of half-blind impulse Bobbin staggered into it. She had no clear or definite idea of what she intended doing, yet fortunately this room was only partially filled with smoke so that she could in a measure see her way about.

There in the corner stood an old-fashioned, heavy wooden chair. Almost instinctively Bobbin seized hold on it. She was curiously strong, doubly so to any other girl of her age, since she had lived outdoors always like a little barbarian. Besides, there was nothing else

that could be done. She must break down Miss O'Neill's door.

With all her force the girl hurled the heavy chair against the oak door. There were a few marks on its surface, yet the door remained absolutely firm, for the Webster house had been built in the days when wood had been plentiful in the New Hampshire hills and homes had been expected to endure.

Nevertheless Bobbin pounded again and again, almost automatically her thin arms seemed to work, and yet all her effort was without avail.

During these moments no one can guess exactly what emotions tore at the girl's heart. If only she could have cried out her alarm and her desire, surely she would have been answered!

Bobbin's face worked strangely, there was a kind of throbbing in her ears and her lips moved. "Polly!" she called in a hoarse little whisper, and this was the first word she had ever spoken in her life.

Inside in her smoke-filled room Polly O'Neill could not possibly have heard her. For the past fifteen minutes, during all

the excitement due to the fire, she had been lying upon her bed in a stifled condition. For no one had realized that as Polly's room was immediately above the back parlor, where the fire had been smouldering ever since the children had gone up-stairs to bed, her room had been first to be filled with smoke. Yet the smoke had come so slowly, so gradually as she lay in a kind of exhausted sleep, that she had been stupefied rather than awakened by it.

Now was it the miracle rather than the sound of Bobbin's speaking her name that penetrated slowly to Polly's consciousness, or was it the noise of the repeated pounding of the heavy chair against her door? Whatever the cause, she came back to the world, choking, blinded, fighting with her hands to keep off the black substance that was crowding into her lungs.

Then somehow she managed to crawl across her room, remembering that the smoke would be denser higher up in the atmosphere. Unlocking the door, she turned the handle and Bobbin caught her as she half fell into the hall.

With a quick movement the girl put her arm about the older woman's waist and started for the stairway, for the hall was dense with smoke and now and then a tongue of flame leaped up from below and seemed to dance for a moment in the air about them.

It was overpowering, unendurable. Polly was already dazed and exhausted and her lungs were always delicate. At the top of the stairs she became a dead weight on her companion's arms. Besides, by this time Bobbin too was very weary.

CHAPTER XX

The Discovery

A FEW moments after Bobbin's disappearance inside the house Mollie O'Neill had suddenly torn herself away from the people closed about her in their effort to hide from her eyes the possible destruction of her home.

She looked searchingly around her.

"Polly!" she called, "Polly!" For the first moment since the fire started, she seemed to be losing her self-control. For all at once it had come to her in a terrifying flash that she had not caught a glimpse of her sister since the moment when she had gone up-stairs at eight o'clock to retire to bed.

Nevertheless Polly must be somewhere near by. She must have heard her calling and she had had plenty of time to escape, more than any one else, as she had no one else to look after save herself. Yet it was not like Polly not to have come at once to her aid with the children!

Mollie ran here and there about the yard, still crying out her sister's name, horror and conviction growing upon her at every step.

At last she caught sight of her husband directing half a dozen men and caught hold of his arm.

"Billy, Polly is still inside the house, locked in her own room. Don't ask me how I know it, I do. We have got to go in and get her." And Mollie started quickly toward the front porch, until her husband flung his arms about her.

"Wait here, Mollie," he said sternly. "You will do no good, only make things harder for me. If Polly is inside the house, as you say, I'll have her out in a jiffy."

Then he called to one of the men. "Keep Mrs. Webster here. On no account let her follow me," he commanded, and glancing about in every direction as he ran, he too made for the house.

Assuredly Mollie was right. Neither had he gotten even a passing glimpse of Polly since the alarm of fire. But was it going to be so simple a matter to rescue her as he had pretended to his wife? For

certainly if Polly had heard nothing of the tumult and danger surrounding her she must be already hurt and unconscious.

Once inside his own hall Billy Webster squared his great shoulders. The way ahead of him now looked like a pathway of flame and yet the smoke was harder to endure than the heat. Nevertheless go through it he must, since Polly's room lay at the head of the stairs.

She must be saved. Billy had a sudden vision of Polly from her girlhood until now; her wilfulness, her charm and her great talent. How stupidly he had opposed her desire to be an actress in the days when he had supposed himself in love with Polly O'Neill instead of her twin sister! Well, now they understood each other and were friends and she should not come to grief in his house.

In his pocket there was a wet handkerchief. Indeed, all his clothes were fortunately damp from the water that had been splashed upon him in the work outdoors. Quickly the man tied the handkerchief about his mouth. Then he took a few steps forward and paused. There

was a noise of something falling from above; possibly some of the timbers of the old house were beginning to give way. Could they be under Polly's room?

But even while he thought, Billy Webster fought his way deliberately forward until he at last reached the bottom of the stairs and then his feet struck something soft and yielding. Stooping down, he caught up two figures in his arms, not one!

For in that moment at the head of the stairs when Polly had lost consciousness Bobbin had managed to half carry, half drag her on a part of the way. Then realizing that her own strength was failing, with instinctive good sense and courage she had flung them both forward, so that they both slid inertly down to the bottom of the stairs.

Instantly and without feeling their weight the man carried the woman and girl out of doors.

Poor Bobbin, whom in these last terrible moments they had forgotten! Yet she it was who had remembered better than them all!

Nevertheless, although both Polly and

Bobbin were unconscious, neither of them was seriously burned. Yet Mollie was dreadfully disturbed. Polly had come to visit them on account of her health, and there was no way of foretelling what effect this night's experience might have upon her. Here she was in her night dress, outdoors in the cold, when the rest of them were warmly clothed.

However, in another moment Polly was comfortably wrapped in a long coat and carried to the nearest house of one of the farm assistants. Bobbin too was equally well looked after, and as soon as she had been in the fresh air for a few moments the girl's breath had come back to her and she was soon almost herself again.

Yet by this time all the women and children had grown tired, for there was nothing that they could do. Five minutes before, Mollie's two boys and little girl and nurse had been taken away and put to bed by one of the farmer's wives. Moreover, real assistance was arriving at last.

In the excitement some one had been intelligent enough to get to the telephone in the dining room before the fire had crept

in that direction. The town of Woodford had promised to send help. Even now the volunteer fire department of the village with an engine and hose carriage was trampling over the snow-covered lawns of the old Webster homestead.

A quarter of an hour later a physician appeared and also Betty and Anthony Graham. Afterwards actually there were dozens of Mollie's and Billy's friends who drove out in their motor cars to take the family home with them, or to do whatever was possible for their relief and comfort.

By this time the fire in the old house had been vanquished and the earth was filled with the cold grayness of approaching dawn.

Mollie would see no one but Betty, who stayed on with her and the physician in the room given up to Polly. Mrs. Wharton had been persuaded not to come, and Anthony Graham had gone back to town to make things clear to her.

"It is just like Polly to be such a ridiculously long time in coming to herself," Betty explained to her frightened friend. "I don't think it means anything in the

least alarming." Yet all the time she was wishing that the physician who held Polly's thin wrist, counting her pulse, would not look so deadly serious.

However, no matter what she might fear herself, Mollie must be strengthened and comforted. Her nerves had given way under the recent strain and fright. It was almost impossible for her to keep her teeth from chattering and she was unable to stand up. Notwithstanding, nothing would persuade her to leave her sister's room.

"For if anything serious is the matter with Polly, of course if will be my fault and I shall never forgive myself," she would repeat over and over. "You see, I forgot Polly; it was only Bobbin who remembered."

Finally, however, there was a sign from the doctor by Polly's bedside which Betty managed to intercept. Without a word to Mollie she slipped across the room to find Polly's eyes wide open and staring in perplexity at her.

"What on earth has happened, Betty?" she demanded impatiently, although her voice was so faint it was difficult to hear.

"What are you and Mollie and I doing in a room I never saw before, with me feeling as if I had been out of the world and then gotten only half-way back into it again?"

At the sound of her sister's voice Mollie had also moved toward the bed. She was distressingly white, her soft blue eyes had dark circles around them and she seemed utterly spent and exhausted.

Quickly Polly reached out her weak hand.

"What is it, Mollie Mavourneen?" she asked nervously, using the name of their childhood.

Then before either woman replied: "Oh, I remember," she said faintly. "There was a dreadful lot of smoke in my room and I got to the door somehow. Bobbin was there and I can't recall anything else."

This time Polly's fingers clung tightly.

"Was any one injured? Was your lovely house burned down?" she inquired.

But Mollie could only shake her head, while the tears ran slowly down her soft cheeks.

However, Betty spoke reassuringly. "It is all right, Polly dear. No one is in the least hurt. We were afraid for a while

you had been stifled by the smoke, but you are perfectly well now. And Billy says the house has been saved. Of course, it has been a good deal damaged inside, but that can soon be restored."

Polly smiled. "Then for goodness sake do put Mollie to bed! She looks like a ghost and I am terribly sleepy myself. I have been ever since eight o'clock last night and I've no doubt it is now nearly morning."

Yet, as her sister and friend were tip-toeing softly away, Polly beckoned Betty to come back to her.

"Bobbin saved my life, didn't she?" she inquired gently. "I don't think I should ever have gotten down that dreadful smoke-filled hall except for her."

Silently Betty nodded; for the moment she did not feel able to speak, because the story of Bobbin's courage and devotion had touched her very deeply.

"It is like bread cast upon the waters, isn't it?" Polly murmured faintly. "It returns to one buttered."

CHAPTER XXI

Once More in Concord

BUT as Polly did not immediately recover from the shock and exposure of the fire, Betty Graham did not return home with her family to Concord.

Anthony took the nurse and children and Faith Barton accompanied them, in order to keep Angelique from being lonely, she explained. However, her real desire, of course, was to be able to see as much as possible of Kenneth Helm.

Nevertheless, the carrying on of her romance with the same secrecy as she had first observed was not so easy now, nor did it seem to Faith so desirable as in the beginning. Yet Kenneth still implored her to say nothing for a short while longer. In a few weeks perhaps things would be all right with him, so that he would have sufficient money not to worry over the future. Then, of course, they could explain the reason for their silence. In the mean-

time, however, perhaps they had best be a little more careful, for people were noticing their intimacy and beginning to talk. Indeed, Faith's chief difficulty was that her foster parents, Rose and Doctor Barton, had observed her marked interest in Kenneth Helm during his Christmas visit with them and had asked Faith if there was anything between them.

Naturally this placed the girl in a painfully trying position. She was devotedly fond of both Rose and Doctor Barton, who were in reality not old enough to be her parents, although they had always treated her like an adored child, giving in to most of her whims and wishes. But while Faith was selfish and considered her own dreams and desires of the utmost importance, she was neither ungrateful nor unloving, nor fond of deceiving the people for whom she cared. The trouble was that she was too much under Kenneth Helm's influence, else she would never have consented to keeping their engagement a secret.

Faith was not aware of the fact, but in reality it was Kenneth who had made the concealment of their affection for each other

appear romantic and alluring to her eyes. Often she had longed to confide the news to Betty after Angel had proved so unexpectedly unsympathetic. However, having given her word to Kenneth, she felt in duty bound to keep it, and moreover she was the least bit afraid of him.

The real truth of the matter was that Faith Barton was more in love with Kenneth than he was with her. Not that Faith was unattractive, but because Kenneth was incapable of caring a great deal for any one except himself.

In the beginning he had been greatly interested, for Faith was pretty and full of a great many amusing ideas and ideals. Moreover, at the time she was a favored member of Governor Graham's family and might turn out to be useful. But Kenneth had no actual desire to marry any one for the present and had not at first taken their engagement seriously. Recently, however, discovering that Faith was desperately in earnest and that she might at any moment announce the fact to her family and friends, the young man had been extremely uncomfortable. More than once he had

reproached himself for not having made a friend of Angelique instead of Faith. She was not nearly so pretty, but she was cleverer and she might have been more helpful.

Indeed, Kenneth rather admired the fashion in which Angel had kept her word with him and had not reported the fact of his presence in the Governor's study on the night of the Inaugural Ball. Besides she had never referred to his accusation against her, so there was no doubt that the little French girl was a true sport, whatever else she might be.

Moreover, when Governor Graham and his family returned to the Governor's mansion it was plain enough that Angel must have enjoyed some good fortune in their absence. She seemed to have cast off her embarrassment and chagrin over the suspicion which had rested upon her, and no one had ever seen her so happy or so gay.

Before little Bettina had been at home five minutes she and Angelique had vanished up-stairs together and were soon locked fast in the big nursery.

Then Angel straightway drew a large envelope out of her pocket and began waving it before Bettina's astonished eyes. Naturally the little girl had no idea that a letter could be so very important, not even so large a one as Angel's.

An instant later and she was the more mystified, for her companion had slipped a long, rather narrow piece of paper, with queer scrawls written upon it, out of the envelope and was also holding it up for her audience to admire.

Bettina smiled politely although a trifle wistfully. It was hard luck not being able to read anything except printed letters when one was as old as six. However, her mother and father did not wish her to become a student too early in life.

"It is a very nice letter, Angel, if it makes you so glad," Bettina remarked gently; "only there does not seem to be a great deal of writing on it."

Then the older girl threw her arm about her little friend's neck and hugged her close.

"Of course you don't understand, darling, and it's hateful of me to tease you," she protested. "But that piece of paper is a

check; it represents two hundred whole dollars, the most money I have ever had at once in my life. And do you know how I got it? Our little picture of 'Snow White and Rose Red' received the prize in the magazine contest. I had a letter, too, saying that though it was not the best drawing, it was the loveliest little girl. So you see it was really all because of you, Bettina, that I got the prize!"

Then Angel did another mysterious thing. She made Bettina close her eyes very tight and while they were closed she clasped something around her neck which fastened with a tiny click. Then on opening them the little girl discovered a shining gold heart outside her white dress, and in the center of the heart a small, clear stone that glittered like a star.

"I got it for you; it is your Christmas present from me, Bettina," Angel explained. "And I want you to try and keep it always so that you may not forget 'Snow White and Rose Red.' Only please don't tell any one of my having gotten the prize until your mother comes home; I want her to know first."

Naturally Bettina promised and having promised she was not a child who ever broke her word. Perhaps the request was an unfortunate one under the circumstances, and yet how could Angel ever have imagined such a possibility?

A few days later, coming into his wife's private sitting room, which was next her bedroom, quite by accident Governor Graham happened to catch sight of a beautiful new silver bowl which he did not recall having seen before. Then besides its newness it had a card lying inside which attracted his attention.

"Some one has sent Betty a Christmas gift which she probably knows nothing of," Anthony thought carelessly. "I must write and tell her of it." Casually he picked up the card and saw Angelique Martins' name engraved upon it.

The next moment he looked at the bowl more attentively. Of course he knew very little of these matters, yet this present struck him as being an exceedingly expensive one from a girl in Angelique's position. She received a very small salary for her work and she must have many needs of her own.

Then Governor Graham frowned uneasily, for he had suddenly remembered that Bettina had exhibited a beautiful little gold chain and necklace which her adored Angel had recently given her. How had the girl acquired so much money all at once? Really he preferred not to have to consider such a question, and yet it might possibly become his duty.

Sitting down in front of the fire, Anthony tried to forget his annoyances in smoking a cigar, but found it impossible.

The close of the Christmas holidays had not made his responsibilities less; indeed, they were crowding more thickly upon him. The lost papers had not been found and in another week ex-Governor Peyton, Jack Emmet and John Everett would have their bill before the Legislature. They had many friends and unless he were able to prove their dishonesty the bill might be passed in spite of the Governor's objections.

Finally Anthony glanced toward the mantel-piece where by chance his eyes rested upon a photograph of Betty.

Immediately his expression changed. "I shall write Betty of this whole business

tonight," he announced out loud, in his determination. "I have been an utter idiot to have kept the situation from her for so long a time. I have wondered recently if perhaps she was not quite so fond of me because I was taking her less into my confidence? Goodness knows, that is the only sensible thing for a man and wife to do! Besides, Betty seemed more like her old self when we were in Woodford and so perhaps I can make her understand how I hate to seem hard on her old friends. But in any case this suspicion that Kenneth Helm has fastened in my mind against Angel must be looked into by Betty. Angel is a young girl and Betty has been like her older sister. Whatever she has done, I don't know that I would have the courage to disgrace her, but perhaps Betty may be able to persuade the child to return the letters to us if she has taken them. Heigh-ho! It will be a relief to me at least to have the Princess take hold of this situation for me."

And Governor Graham spent the entire evening in his sitting room writing to his wife until after midnight.

CHAPTER XXII

Things Are Cleared Up

AS Polly was a little better, immediately upon receipt of her husband's letter Betty hurried home.

First she and Anthony had a long talk together until things were once more quite clear and happy between them.

Of course Anthony insisted that he had been unreasonable and that Betty was a "Counsel of Perfection" just as he had always believed her; nevertheless the Princess was by no means ready to agree with him; nor was Polly's little sermon in Sunrise Cabin ever entirely forgotten.

Naturally Betty was grieved to hear that Anthony considered her old friend, John Everett, and also Meg's husband, Jack Emmet, dishonest; yet when he had carefully explained all his reasons for thinking so, she was finally convinced.

Not for a single instant, however, would she consider the bare possibility of Ange-

lique Martins' having had anything to do with the loss of the Governor's important letters. She had known Angel too long and too well and trusted her entirely. Besides, she had been one of her own Camp Fire girls who had kept the Camp Fire laws and gained its not easily acquired honors.

So Betty Graham did the only intelligent thing in all such difficulties and suspicions—she went directly to Angel and told her that she believed in her, but asked that they might discuss the whole matter. She even told her that she and Governor Graham had both wondered at her having a sum of money which she could scarcely have earned through her work.

The woman and the girl were in Betty's pretty sitting room when they had their long talk. It was their first meeting without other people being present since Mrs. Graham's return. And Angel sat on a little stool at her friend's feet with her dark eyes gazing directly into those of her dearest friend.

It was good to have this opportunity for confidences. Angel breathed a sigh of relief when she learned that the Governor

had confessed his own suspicion to his wife. For she had never a moment's fear that Betty might fail in faith toward her. Of course, she had never seen the missing letters and had no idea what could have become of them.

Perhaps it was curious, yet not even to the Governor's wife did Angelique during this interview speak of her own distrust of Kenneth Helm. She was hardly conscious of the exact reasons for her reticence, except she had no possible proof against Kenneth, and Betty and the Governor were both fond of him. Moreover, it seemed a disloyalty to Faith Barton to suspect the man to whom Faith had given her affection.

But Angel was very happy to explain where she had acquired her recent wealth and Betty was as happy and proud as only Betty Graham could be of her friends' good fortunes. She could hardly wait to see the picture, of course, and registered an unspoken vow that Angel should have art lessons when she had so much talent, no matter how much the girl herself might oppose the idea. Certainly she and Anthony would owe this much to their

little friend for even the faintest doubt of her.

But Angel had other information which she was even more shy in confessing. It did not amount to very much at present, only she and Horace Everett had taken a great fancy to each other during Horace's stay in Concord for the Christmas holidays. She had seen him nearly every day and Horace had made no secret of his liking for her. He had not exactly proposed, but had told her that he meant to as soon as he had known her long enough to make it proper.

It was all very beautiful and unexpected to Angelique, for she had seldom dreamed of any one's caring for her in just this particular way. And that it should be so splendid a person as Horace Everett made everything more wonderful. Of course, Angel could not be so unhappy as she had been before Christmas; nevertheless, for Betty's and Governor Graham's sake she felt that the mystery of the lost letters must be cleared up within the next few days.

There was only one piece of information, however, which Betty had given her that offered any possible clue to the enigma.

Governor Graham believed that whoever had taken the letters had probably sold them to the three men who would most profit by their disappearance.

Yet Angel had no experience in the work of a detective and could only hope to be of use, without the faintest idea of how she might manage it.

There was one thing, however, which Angelique regarded as her absolute duty after her own talk with Betty Graham. She simply must endeavor to be better friends with Faith Barton. For somehow Betty's faith and affection for her had served to remind her of her almost forgotten Camp Fire loyalties.

Kinder than any one else except Betty, Faith had certainly been to her long ago, when she had first come, ill and a stranger, to Sunrise Cabin. Besides, what had Faith ever done except be a little selfish and unreasonable of late, and Angel knew that she was troubled by her own affairs?

It was only a few nights after her own interview with Betty, when one evening immediately after dinner, Angel went up alone to Faith's room for the first time since

their misunderstanding. She did not know whether Faith would care to see her, but she meant to try. For Faith had not dined with the rest of the family; she had sent down word that she had a headache and desired to be left alone.

Nevertheless, when she discovered who it was who was knocking at her door, she grudgingly said, "Come in."

The truth was that Faith was unhappy and needed consolation. She had never had any trouble in her life before without some one to comfort her, and now possibly Angel was the only person who could be of service, since Angel alone knew her secret.

Faith was sitting up in bed looking very pretty in a pale blue cashmere dressing gown with a cap of white muslin and lace on her fair hair. Yet she had plainly been crying, for her eyes and nose were both a little red. Moreover, she had eaten no dinner, as a tray of food sat untouched on a small table close beside her.

So Angel's first effort was quietly to persuade Faith to have something to eat. Then she led her to talking of Woodford and the Christmas with Rose and Doctor

Barton. And within a few moments Faith was again in tears.

It could not be very wrong, she then decided, to confide what was worrying her to so insignificant a person as Angel. Surely even Kenneth could not resent this!

So Faith revealed the fact that she had recently received a letter from Rose Barton and that Rose had asked her again if she felt any unusual interest in Kenneth Helm. Rose had been very kind and had said more than once that she did not wish to force Faith's confidence. Only she cared for her and her happiness so much that she hoped Faith would keep no secret of this kind from her.

And Faith had gone immediately with this letter to Kenneth Helm, begging him that she at least be allowed to confess their engagement to the two friends who had been almost more than a father and mother to her.

However, Kenneth had absolutely and flatly refused and Faith could not make up her mind what she should do.

Without a word or a sign Angelique heard the entire story through, although

she was secretly raging with indignation against Kenneth and wondering how Faith could possibly be so much under his influence that she seemed to have no mind or will of her own.

Moreover, even after Faith had ended her story and sat evidently waiting for some comment from her companion, Angel could think of nothing to say that would be sufficiently circumspect. For if she even so much as breathed a word against Kenneth, Faith would probably be exceedingly angry and rally to his defence at once. So the little French girl sat motionless on the side of the bed, staring rather stupidly at the wall opposite her.

By and by, however, Faith leaned over and put her arms about her.

"Tell me, Angel, just what you would do if you were in my place?" the girl pleaded. "Really, I am so miserable I can't decide."

Angel looked at her earnestly. "Do you really mean that?" she queried. And when Faith bowed her head, she answered decisively:

"Why, if I were you, I should simply write to Kenneth Helm tonight and say to

him that he was either to allow you to tell Rose and Doctor Barton of your engagement or else you would consider your engagement broken."

Faith caught her breath and then her cheeks flushed.

"Would you mind getting me some paper and the pen and ink out of my desk?" she returned quietly.

And Angel, almost dazed by the quickness with which the other girl had accepted her suggestion, at once walked over to her desk. But the drawer of the desk which contained the paper had stuck and as she had only one hand (the other held her cane) she had to tug and tug at it before it would come loose.

Then of course it behaved in the usual fashion. For suddenly the entire drawer plunged forward and every single thing it contained scattered over the floor. There were letters and papers and ribbons and photographs and pens and pencils and powder puffs.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Faith dear! I am the most awkward person in the whole world," Angel apologized. "But if you'll

She Sprang Out of Bed Herself the Next Moment

just forgive me I'll clear up in half a minute."

Faith smiled a little restlessly as her friend stooped to her task.

However, she sprang out of bed herself the next moment, for Angel had picked up a package from the floor which had a blue paper and a rubber band about it and was also marked with the Governor's official seal.

Faith tried to jerk the letters from her friend's hand.

"Put those down at once, Angel!" she commanded angrily. "Why don't you do as I tell you? Those papers are not mine; I am keeping them for Kenneth Helm. He told me they were of the most private nature possible and that no one was to be allowed to see them."

However, even after this stern injunction, the French girl did not give up the package of letters. Instead, without Faith's being aware of her intention, she kept edging nearer and nearer toward the door which led into the hall and so farther along to Betty's and Governor Graham's room. She remembered that they had also gone

up-stairs together after dinner. And her hope was that they had not yet left the house.

Then suddenly she turned, and running faster than she ever had since her lameness she got out of Faith's bedroom and was on her way to her desired destination.

Moreover, for the moment Faith made no effort to follow her, for she believed Angel to have lost her senses.

Why should she desire to run away with Kenneth Helm's private papers? Faith could even now hear Angel's cane tapping its way rapidly along the hall.

Then she ran to the door and stuck her head out, calling the other girl to return. She didn't quite dare follow her, for she had on only her night-dress and dressing gown and the servants or Governor Graham might probably see her.

For another half hour Faith had to remain in anger and suspense. Of course, she dressed as quickly as possible and went to Angel's room, but Angel was not there, neither could she be discovered in her of the children's nurseries or in any room on the ground floor.

At last in desperation Faith knocked on Mrs. Graham's sitting room door. It was Betty herself who answered the knock, although Faith caught a glimpse of Angelique Martins standing with the Governor under a rose-colored electric light and thought they both looked unusually cheerful.

Moreover, it was Betty and not Angel who returned to the bedroom with Faith.

Just as carefully and as kindly as she could Betty then explained the importance of Angel's discovery to her guest. She said that it was very hard indeed for them to believe that Kenneth Helm had stolen these letters, since Governor Graham had felt every confidence in him. However, if Faith declared that Kenneth had given her the letters for safe-keeping, there was nothing else for them to believe. He must have demanded a larger sum of money for the papers than the other men were willing to pay him. Therefore, it had evidently been his intention to keep them until the last moment in order to accomplish his end.

Of course, this statement of Betty Graham's at the time was only a surmise

on the part of her husband, notwithstanding it turned out to be the correct one.

For Kenneth Helm finally confessed the truth himself in the face of the evidence which Governor Graham held against him. His only excuse was the dangerous and disastrous one that he had longed to grow rich sooner than he could with the every-day grind of a business career.

So, after all, Faith Barton wrote her letter on the same evening she had intended. Betty's and Angel's and Governor Graham's suspicions of Kenneth, besides the facts themselves, were more than enough to convince her judgment, especially when her heart had been having its own misgivings for some time past.

It was in entire meekness of spirit and yet in thanksgiving that Faith Barton decided upon breaking off her engagement, which she was glad never to have acknowledged to any one save Angelique Martins. Angel, she knew, would never betray her. Nevertheless, before Faith had been at home twenty-four hours she had confessed the entire story to Rose Barton and together they had wept over her fortunate escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

Finis

POLLY O'NEILL was on her sister's front porch reading a letter from Doctor Sylvia Wharton. It was now spring time.

Sylvia had written that Bobbin was getting on at school in the most amazing fashion. Not only could she now pronounce Polly's name but hundreds of others, and she could certainly hear better than she had several months before.

Nevertheless, Polly let the letter slide out of her hand and the tears came to her eyes. She was not sad, however, only so extremely glad for Bobbin's sake and for her own.

"After all, perhaps I am not so entirely selfish a human being as some persons believe me," she announced to herself with a shrug of her shoulders. "For at least one little girl in this world does not think so, and never shall."

Then Polly closed her eyes and fell to dreaming. She was not really asleep, only resting. She had had rather a hard struggle after Mollie's fire and her own unfortunate part in it. That wretched cold she had taken settled on her lungs immediately afterwards and she was now only strong enough to lead an ordinary existence. There was no thought of her acting again until the next fall.

She was not yet feeling particularly vigorous, so now although she plainly heard the sound of a man's footsteps approaching the veranda, she made no effort to open her eyes. It was probably Billy or one of his farm men. If a question should be asked of her then would come the time for answering it.

Nevertheless, she had not expected that the man would walk deliberately up to her and then stand in front of her without saying a word.

Miss O'Neill felt annoyed and her cheeks flamed with the two bright spots of color always characteristic of her. Notwithstanding, she opened her eyes coldly and calmly, haughtily she hoped.

The intruder did not flinch. He merely continued gazing at her and still without speaking.

But Polly's flush burned deeper, although she also said nothing.

"I had to come, Miss Polly," Richard Hunt announced at last.

Polly motioned to a chair near by. "You were good—to trouble," she returned slowly. "It has been four months since I saw you last and asked you to come; and since then I have very nearly died."

Then she smiled and held out her hand with the utmost friendliness.

"Forgive me," she begged. "I am glad to see you at any time. I am afraid I am behaving like the preacher who reproaches the members of his congregation for not doing their duty and attending service on the very Sundays when they have shown up."

But Richard Hunt would not be frivolous.

"Have you wanted to see me?" he asked gravely.

Polly nodded.

"Then why didn't you write or have some one tell me? I would have come across the world if I had known." he replied.

In return Polly shrugged her shoulders. "I did everything I could when we were in Colorado to persuade you to be friends with me again. I behaved without the least pride; I almost begged you to be kind to me. Of course you were very nice then and interested in Bobbin, but I could not go on forever pleading for your friendship. Still I thought at least when you heard I was ill that you might be sorry."

Then to her own complete chagrin Polly felt her eyes filling with tears.

How big and strong and restful Richard Hunt looked! Why had she not had the sense to have married him in the days when he had cared for her? Somehow she believed that her life would have been ever so much happier and more satisfying. She could have gone on with her work too, because no one in the world except Richard Hunt had ever understood how much of her heart was wrapped up in it — perhaps because he was an actor himself and loved his own art.

Notwithstanding, Polly realized that she could scarcely cry before her visitor for his affection, which she had so deliberately

thrown away a good many years before. Moreover, what would Mollie think of her bad manners toward their guest?

Slowly she got up from her chair.

"Do come into the house with me and see my sister, Mr. Hunt?" she said graciously. "And you must stay and have lunch with us, or even longer if you will. I am sure my brother-in-law will be more than happy to meet you again."

But Richard Hunt did not stir. "Please sit down again, Polly," he urged more gently. "You don't look strong enough to be walking about alone. I want to explain to you why I have seemed unappreciative of your friendliness. You will have to understand this in the future as well as now, for possibly after today I shall not see you again."

"Oh!" Polly exclaimed a little huskily, and fortunately she could not see how white her own face had turned. However, at this moment her companion was not looking at her.

"I can't be your friend, because I happen still to be too much in love with you for mere friendship," Richard Hunt continued

in the quiet, self-contained fashion that had always made so strong an impression upon his companion. "I know that I have had many years to get over this feeling for you, Polly, and that I should not trouble you by mentioning my love again. Only I want you to forgive me and to realize why I may have seemed not to appreciate your wish to be friends."

But Polly was now smiling through her tears and holding out both hands in her old irrepressible Irish fashion that neither the years nor circumstances could change.

"But I don't want to be just friends with you either, Richard, if you are still willing for me to be something more after the way I have behaved," she whispered. "You see I only pretended I wanted to be your friend so you would not give me up altogether."

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